OVERLORD 1 The undead king *Kugane Maruyama*

illustration by so-bin

オーバーロード 1 不死者の王

丸山くがね

The world is all yours.

［這個世界都是您的——］

納薩力克地下大墳墓
Underground large grave of Nazarick
【地下一～三層】墳墓
The 1st to 3rd basement
Grave
【地下四層】地底湖
The 4th basement
Underground lake
【地下五層】冰河
The 5th basement
Glacier
【地下六層】叢林
The 6th basement
The jungle
【地下七層】岩漿
The 7th basement
Lava
【地下八層】荒野
The 8th basement
The wilderness
【地下九層】皇家套房
The 9th basement
Royal Suite
【地下十層】王座
The 10th basement
Throne

モモンガ

Heteromorphic Race

[アインズ・ウール・ゴウン]

MOMONGA

[ainz ooal gown]

THE STRONGEST MAGIC CHANTER WITH THE APPEARANCE OF A SKELETON

Job	One of the Almighty 41 Supreme Beings Ruler of the Great Tomb of Nazarick	
Residence	Great Tomb of Nazarick Room in level 9	
Alignment	Extreme Evil	Sense of Justice: -500
Racial Level	Skeleton Mage	15 lv
	Elder Lich	10 lv
	Overlord	5 lv
	Others	
Job Level	Necromancer	10 lv
	Ruler of Death	10 lv
	Others	

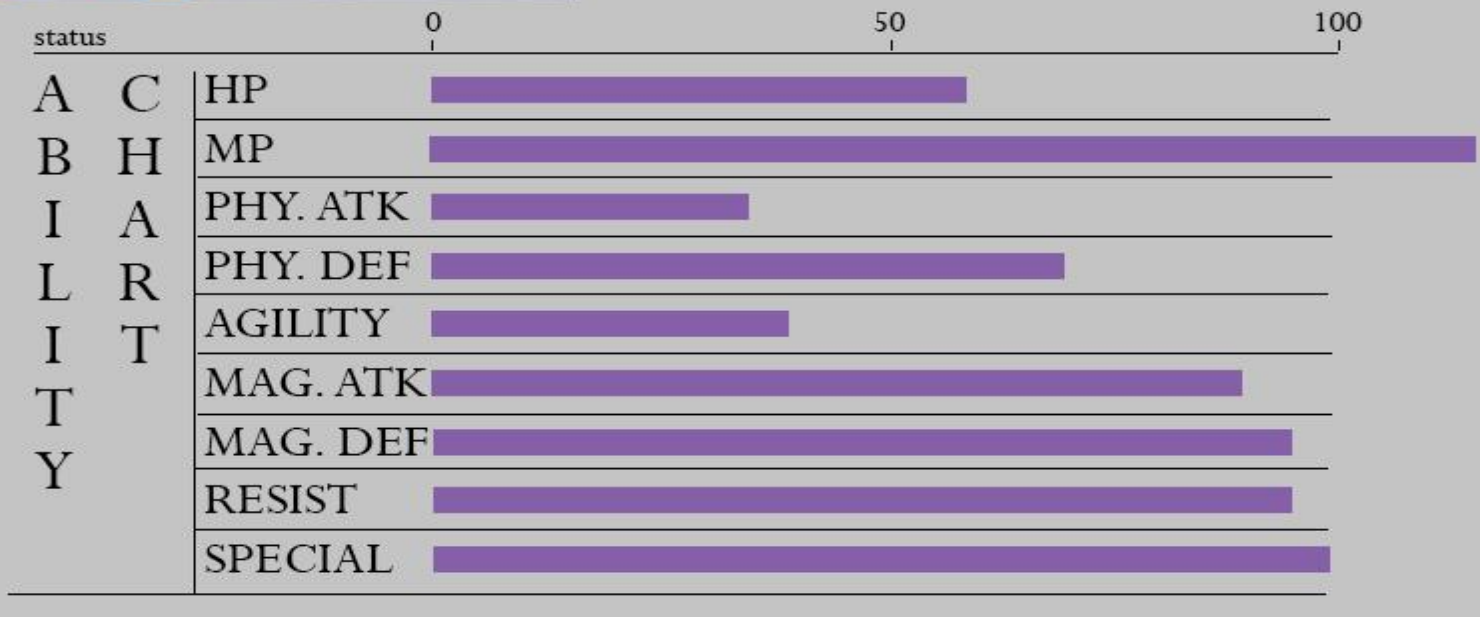
[Racial level] + [Job level] Total 100 level

Racial level — Job level

Total 40 level — Total 60 level

ABILITY CHART

status



アルベド

Heteromorphic Race

ALBEDO

WARM AND CARING
DEVIL OF PURE WHITE

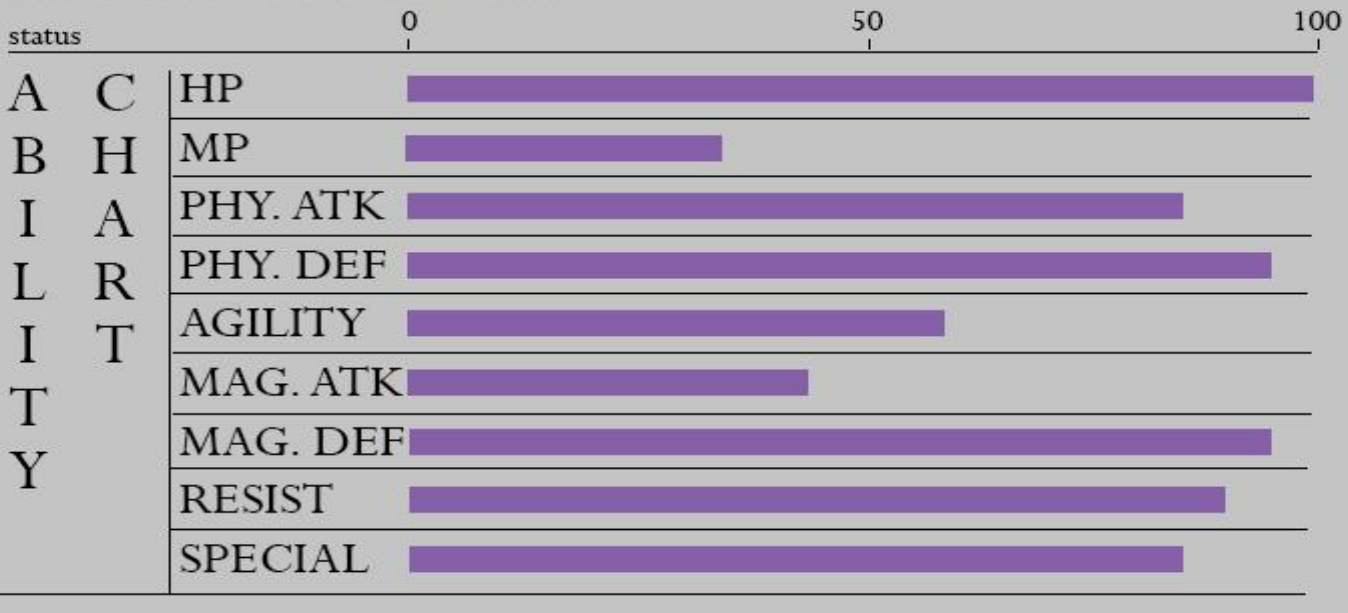
Job	Great Tomb of Nazarick Overseer Queen (Self Proclaimed)	
Residence	Throne Hall And a room in level 9	
Alignment	Extreme Evil	Sense of Justice: -500
Racial Level	Imp	10 lv
	Others	
Job Level	Guardian	10 lv
	Blackguard	5 lv
	Unholy Knight	10 lv
	Shield Lord	10 lv
	Others	

[Racial level] + [Job level] Total 100 level

Racial level — Job level

Total 30 level — Total 70 level

ABILITY CHART



Character 3

アウラ・ベロ・フィオーラ

Human
Race

AURA BELLA FIORA

RENOWNED TRAINER WITH AN INDOMINABLE WILL

Job	Great Tomb of Nazarick 6th Floor Guardian	
Residence	6th Floor Giant Tree	
Alignment	Neutral~Evil	Sense of Justice: -100
Racial Level	Human races don't have a Race Level	
Job Level	Ranger	5 lv
	Beast Tamer	5 lv
	Archer	5 lv
	Sniper	5 lv
	Master Tamer	10 lv
	Others	

Job level

Total 100 level

ABILITY CHART

status

	0	50	100
HP			
MP			
PHY. ATK			
PHY. DEF			
AGILITY			
MAG. ATK			
MAG. DEF			
RESIST			
SPECIAL			

マーレ・ベロ・フィオーレ

Human
Race

MARE BELLO FIORE

UNRELIABLE ENVOY OF NATURE

Job	Great Tomb of Nazarick 6th Floor Guardian	
Residence	6th Floor Giant Tree	
Alignment	Neutral~Evil	Sense of Justice: -100
Racial Level	Human races don't have a Race Level	
Job Level	Druid	10 lv
	Arch Druid	10 lv
	Vanguard of Nature	10 lv
	Apostle of Catastrophe	5 lv
	Forest Shaman	10 lv
	Others	

Job level

Total 100 level

OVERLORD

The Undead King

Overlord Volume 1

PROLOGUE

The knight in full plate armor stood before the girl and her little sister, his sword raised high.

His blade gleamed in the sun, and he poised himself, ready to end their lives in a single merciful stroke.

The girl squeezed her eyes tightly shut and bit her lower lip. She had never asked for this. She had been forced into her present circumstances. If only she had some strength, she might have resisted the enemy in front of her and fled.

However — the girl did not have that strength.

Thus, there could only be one outcome to this situation.

That would be the girl's death, at this very place.
The longsword fell—

—And yet there was no pain.

The girl gingerly opened the eyes which had been squeezed shut.

The first thing she saw was the suddenly motionless longsword.

Then, she saw the sword's owner.

The knight in front of her was frozen in place, his eyes looking somewhere off to the girl's side. His completely defenseless posture clearly displayed the fear that filled him.

As though drawn by the knight's gaze, the girl could not help but turn and look in the same direction as him.

And so — the girl gazed upon despair.

What she saw was darkness.

It was an infinitesimally thin, yet unfathomably deep blackness. It was a half-oval of obsidian that seemed to protrude from the earth. It was a mysterious sight that filled the ones watching it with a powerful sense of unease.

Was it a door?

The girl could not help but think so after she saw what lay before her.

As her heart lurched, the girl's conjecture was confirmed.

Something seemed to be coming out of that shadowy passage.

And in the moment that it resolved itself in her eyes—

"Hiiiiiiii!"

—A deafening shriek came from the girl.

It was an opponent humanity could not overcome.

Twin points of crimson light burned brightly within the empty orbits of a bleached skull. Those two points of light coldly scanned the girl and the others present, like a predator sizing up its prey. Within its fleshless hands it grasped a magic staff that seemed divine in nature, yet inspired dread in equal measure. It was like a crystallization of all the beauty in the world.

It wore an intricately detailed black robe, and it resembled nothing so much as an incarnation of death, born from the darkness of another world.

In an instant, the air seemed to freeze.

It was as though time itself had stood still in the wake of a Supreme Being's advent.

The girl forgot to breathe, as if the sight had stolen her soul away.

Then, in this silent world, the girl began choking, and gasped for air.

This avatar of death must have manifested itself in order to guide her to the underworld. It was only natural to think so. But then, the girl who thought this way suddenly realized that something was wrong. That was because the knight who had been planning to kill her from behind was now completely still.

“Gaaah...”

A cry that sounded like a wail crept into her ears.

From whose mouth had that sound come? It felt like it could have been hers, or her little sister, shivering in fright, or from the mouth of the knight that had been about to kill her.

A skeletal hand slowly extended itself — its fingers spreading as though reaching for something, and they moved past the girl, toward the knight behind her.

She wanted to look away from it, but fear kept her gaze in place. She had the feeling that if she averted her eyes, she would see a far more horrible sight instead.

“[Grasp Heart].”

The incarnation of death clenched its fist, and the girl heard the sound of crunching metal from behind her.

Her eyes did not leave the figure of Death, but driven by her curiosity, the girl wrenched her eyes away, and saw the body of the knight. He was sprawled motionless on the floor, like a puppet whose strings had been cut.

He was dead.

There was no doubt that he was dead.

The danger that had almost claimed the girl was no more. But this was no cause for celebration. The death that stalked her had merely taken a more concrete shape.

That death drew close to the girl, who watched it with terrified eyes.

The darkness in her field of vision grew ever larger.

It's going to swallow me up.

As the girl thought this, she clutched her sister tightly to herself.

The notion of escape no longer existed within the girl's head.

If her opponent were human, she might be able to cling to some faint hope and struggle desperately for her life. But the being before her shattered that hope like spun glass.

Please, at least let me die without pain.

That was all the girl could hope for.

Her shuddering sister hugged her tightly. All she could do was apologize for her weakness, for being unable to protect her sister's life. She prayed that her sister would not be lonely as they went on to the afterlife, because they would be travelling there together.

And then—

第一章 開始與結束

Overlord Volume 1

CHAPTER 1

THE END AND THE BEGINNING

Part 1

In the year 2138 AD there was a term: DMMO-RPG.

That word was an acronym for “Dive Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game”.
These games were played by connecting a dedicated console to the brain via a neuronal nano-interface— an intracerebral nano-computer network, created from the fusion of cyber- and nano-technology.

These were games that allowed one to enter a virtual world and experience it as though it were real life.

And among the myriad DMMO-RPGs that thronged the market, one of them stood head and shoulders above the others:

YGGDRASIL.

This game had been painstakingly developed and released 12 years ago, in 2126.

Compared to other DMMO-RPGs of the time, YGGDRASIL’s selling point was “player freedom”.

It had over 2000 basic and advanced job classes.

Every class had a maximum of 15 levels, and so in order to reach the overall level cap of 100, one would need to take at least 7 different classes. However, players could take as many classes as they wanted as long as they met each class’ prerequisites. A player could even take 100 classes at level 1 each, although that was very inefficient. As such, in this system, it was virtually

impossible to make identical characters unless one was deliberately trying to do so.

In addition, one could use various creator tools (sold separately) to fully customize one's armor, weaponry, flavor text, appearance, and other cosmetic settings.

A vast playing field awaited its players. There were nine worlds in total: Asgard, Alfheim, Vanaheim, Nidavellir, Midgard, Jotunheim, Niflheim, Helheim, and Muspelheim.

It boasted a massive world, numerous classes, and freely customizable appearances.

These features ignited the creative spirits of its Japanese players, and sparked what would later be known as a stylistic revolution. So popular was it that whenever the word "DMMO-RPG" was mentioned in Japan, listeners would immediately think of YGGDRASIL.

—Still, all these were things of the past now.

♦ ♦ ♦

A gigantic table carved of gleaming black stone sat in the center of the room, surrounded by 41 luxurious chairs.

However, most of those seats were empty.

Once, every single place had been filled, but now only two were occupied.

One of the seated people was clothed in a magnificent black academic robe, edged in violet and gold. The collar seemed excessively gaudy, but somehow it fit the overall design.

However, the exposed head was a bare skull. Points of dark red light glowed in its large orbits, and behind the skull glowed a halo of black radiance.

The being in the other seat was not human either, merely a mass of a black, sticky substance. Its tar-like surface roiled and writhe continuously, never staying in one shape for more than a second.

The former was an Overlord — the highest-ranked of those magic casters who had become undead in order to learn the most potent spells. The latter was an Elder Black Ooze, which boasted the most powerful corrosive ability of the slime families.

One might encounter these monsters in the most difficult dungeons. Overlords could use powerful spells of the highest tiers of magic, while Elder Black Oozes were dreaded for their ability to degrade weapons and armor.

However, they were not game monsters, but players.

In YGGDRASIL, players could choose their character races from three broad groups; humanoid, demihuman and heteromorphic.

Humanoids were the basic player type and comprised humans, dwarves, wood elves, and the like. Demihumans tended to be ugly, but possessed superior attributes to humanoids. Examples of demihumans were goblins, beastmen, ogres and so on. Finally, heteromorphic races had monstrous abilities, but despite their stats being generally higher than those of other races, they also possessed various drawbacks. There were around 700 playable races in total, including the advanced versions of these races.

Naturally, the Overlord and Elder Black Ooze were among the high-tier heteromorphic races that were playable.

The Overlord — who was speaking at the moment — did not move his mouth. That was because even the most advanced DMMO-RPGs of the time still could not overcome the technological hurdle of properly modelling the changes on a character's face in response to emotions and speech.

"It's really been a while, Herohero-san. Although this is the last day of YGGDRASIL, I didn't expect you to show up."

"Indeed it has, Momonga-san."

The two of them spoke with the voices of grown men, but compared to the voice of the former, the latter's words lacked force, or perhaps it could be said that they lacked energy.

"You stopped coming online after you changed your job IRL, so how long has it been... about 2 years?"

"Ah — seems about right — wah, it's been so long… This is bad. I've been doing so much overtime recently that my sense of time is starting to go weird."

"That's really bad, right? Are you okay?"

"My body? Well, it's a mess. I haven't had to see a doctor yet, but I'm almost there, it's really bad. A lot of times, I feel like I want to run away from it all, but then I think about how I need money to live and then I go back to work like a whipped slave."

"Uwah—"

The Overlord — Momonga — lowered his head in an "I can't take it" gesture.

"That's terrible."

As though following up on Momonga's comment, Herohero delivered a grim monologue, his words laced with an unimaginable reality.

The two of them griped loudly about the foolishness they encountered in their working lives.

Subordinates who did not know how to report, communicate and discuss things, spreadsheets that changed by the day, scoldings by their superiors for not meeting various KPIs, working late every day until they could not go home, gaining weight because of their irregular lifestyles, and the increasing amounts of medicine they had to take every day.

Herohero's grievances burst forth like a broken dam, and Momonga lent his ear to him.

A lot of people would be averse to discussing reality in a virtual world. It was fairly normal for people to not want to talk about their offline lives in a game.

However, this was not so for the two of them.

The guild they belonged to — a group that was founded and managed by players — Ainz Ooal Gown, had two conditions that each of its members had to fulfil. The first was that everyone had to be a functioning part of society. The other was that they had to play heteromorphic characters.

Because of these rules, the topics they discussed often revolved around their jobs in the real world. Any member of the guild would field these questions and as such, the conversation between the two could be considered standard fare for the guild.

After about ten minutes, the torrent of words that flowed from Herohero dwindled to a trickle.

"...I'm sorry for making you listen to my whining. I can't complain much IRL."

The place corresponding to Herohero's head seemed to sway, as though he were bowing in apology. Thus, Momonga replied:

"Don't worry about it, Herohero-san. I made you come online despite you being busy, so listening to your complaints is only expected. I'll hear you out, no matter how many you have."

Herohero seemed to have recovered some of his old energy, and with a somewhat more energetic laugh, he replied:

"Ah, I'm grateful for that, Momonga-san. I'm glad I could meet a friend after signing on."

"I'm very happy to hear you say that too."

"...Although it's about time for me to log off."

Herohero's tentacle waggled in mid-air, as though he were operating something. Indeed, he was operating a menu.

“You’re right, it is getting pretty late…”

“I’m sorry about this, Momonga-san.”

Momonga sighed gently, as though he didn’t want Herohero to sense the regret in his heart.

“Well, if it’s like that, then it’s a shame… time flies so fast when you’re having fun.”

“I really did want to stay with you to the end, but I’m about to fall asleep.”

“Ah — well, you do sound pretty tired. Then, you should log out soon and have a good rest.”

“I’m really sorry… Momonga-san. Although, how long do you plan to stay, Guild Leader?”

“I intended to stay on until I was automatically logged out once the servers shut down. Since it’s still a ways off, maybe someone might come by in the meantime.”

“Is that so… still, I really didn’t expect this place to be so well preserved.”

At this moment, Momonga was grateful that he had no way to show his expressions. If he did, Herohero would probably have seen his face twist up. Even then, his voice would betray how he truly felt, so Momonga kept quiet, in order to suppress the feelings surging up within him.

He had worked hard to maintain the guild precisely because he had built it up along with everyone else, but hearing words like these from one of his guild members sparked a mix of complicated emotions in his heart. However, these feelings dispersed like mist as Herohero continued.

“Momonga-san, you must have kept the guild going as its leader so we could come back to it at any time. Thank you very much.”

“...It’s because it was a guild built by everyone, so it’s my job as guildmaster to keep things going so that the members can come back at any time.”

“Yes. We had fun with the game because you were our guildmaster, Momonga-san… I hope that when we meet again, it’ll be in YGGDRASIL II.”

“I haven’t heard anything about a second game… but like you said, I’d be glad if we could meet like that.”

“I’ll look forward to it! I’m having trouble staying awake… I think I’ll log off first. I’m glad I could meet you at the end. Goodnight.”

“…”

Momonga wanted to say something, but he hesitated for a moment, and then he spoke:

“I was very happy to meet you too. Goodnight.”

A smiley appeared near Herohero’s head. Since characters in YGGDRASIL could not express emotions through their facial expressions, they used emoticons instead.

Momonga worked his control interface, and produced a similar smiley.

Herohero’s last words were: “Let’s meet up again somewhere.”

—And so, the last of the three guild members to come online tonight vanished.

Silence descended once more — it was as though nobody had ever been here in the first place. Nothing was left behind.

Momonga looked at the place where Herohero had been sitting, and he muttered the words he wanted to say.

“Today’s the last day of the game, I know you’re tired, but we’ll never have a chance like this again, why don’t we stay together until the end—”

Of course, there was no response, because Herohero had already returned to reality.

“Haahh.”

Momonga’s sigh came from the bottom of his heart.

In the end, it was better that it had remained unsaid.

During their brief exchange, he could already tell how tired Herohero was from the sound of his voice. Still, despite his fatigue, Herohero had still responded to the e-mail he had sent, and logged on for the last day of YGGDRASIL before it closed down. He should have been grateful enough for that. Asking him to stay on would not just have been a matter of being thick-skinned, but actively causing him trouble.

Momonga stared at the seat Herohero had occupied until just now, and then turned to look at the other 39 seats. Those were the places where his old comrades had once sat. After going a circle around the table, Momonga returned his eyes to Herohero’s place.

“Let’s meet up again somewhere… huh.”

Let’s meet up again somewhere.

See you again.

He had heard these words several times before, but they had never come true.

Nobody had ever returned to YGGDRASIL.

“When and where will we meet again—”

Momonga’s shoulders shook violently, and the words he could no longer hold back exploded forth:

“—Are you kidding me?!”

He pounded the table as he shouted.

The YGGDRASIL system registered this action as an attack, and began the complex calculations of Momonga's barehanded attack strength against the table's defensive strength to determine the final total of damage inflicted. In the end, the area Momonga had struck emitted a simple [0].

"This is the Great Tomb of Nazarick that we built together! How could you abandon it just like that?!"

After he shouted the words in his heart, the only thing left in there was emptiness.

"...No, that's not right. They didn't abandon it lightly, they simply made the choice between reality and fantasy. It couldn't be helped. Nobody would betray the guild. Everyone who made that decision must have found it painful…"

Momonga muttered like he was trying to convince himself, and then he stood up. He walked toward the wall, where an elaborately decorated magic staff was kept.

—Seven serpents twined around the body of the staff, which resembled the *kerukeion* carried by Hermes Trismegistus. The serpents' mouths gaped open in agony, and each mouth held a gem of a different color. The grip was exquisitely carved out of crystal and glowed with blue light.

Anyone would be able to recognize this staff as a supremely high-quality item, and it was a Guild Weapon that was unique to this guild. One could call it the symbol of Ainz Ooal Gown.

This staff, which should have been a treasure held by the guildmaster, was instead kept in this room as a decoration.

That was because there was nothing else which represented the guild quite like this.

Guild weapons were typically kept hidden away in safe places and not used for their tremendous powers because a guild would be disbanded if its

associated guild weapon was destroyed. Even Ainz Ooal Gown, a guild which existed at the peak of YGGDRASIL, was no exception to this.

This was the reason why the weapon had been kept here, and Momonga had never touched it, despite the fact that it had been tailor-made to complement his abilities.

Momonga extended a hand to the staff, but stopped halfway. This was because at this moment — in the last few minutes before YGGDRASIL shut down for good, he realised that soon the glorious memories he had made with his comrades would be lost forever, like tears in rain. The confusion he felt over this made him hesitate as he struggled to come to a decision.

♦ ♦ ♦

Everyone had adventured every day, with the sole purpose of assembling the guild weapon.

Back then, they had had contests to see who could collect more raw materials more quickly, and there had been many of disputes over the appearance weapon. But slowly, after everyone's opinions were gathered, the weapon gradually took shape.

That period of time had been the prime of Ainz Ooal Gown, when all the glorious memories he had were made.

People had dragged themselves online after a gruelling day at work, others had argued with their wives because they played until they neglected their families, and some even laughed and said they had taken special leave to stay home from work and log on to the game.

There were times when they had spent entire days doing nothing but talking about silly things for amusement. There were times when they would draw up plans for adventures, and times when they went looking for treasures. They had also mounted raids on enemy guilds' home bases and laid siege to their strongholds. Once, they had been attacked by a World-class Enemy — an immensely powerful, hidden boss monster — and the guild had nearly been destroyed as a result. They had also discovered many previously unknown

resources, and they had placed all sorts of monsters in their guild base in order to eliminate invading players.

However, as of today, nobody was left.

Of the 41 members of the guild, 37 of them had quit. The other three were still registered as members of the guild, but Momonga had already lost count of the number of days since they had last come here.

Momonga opened a system console and connected to the developers' website to inspect the official guild rankings. Right now there were just under 800 guilds in YGGDRASIL. In the past, they had ranked as high as the 9th place, but now — as of the last day of the game — they were in the 29th place. At their lowest, they had fallen to 48th place.

The reason why their ranking had not fallen even further was not because of Momonga's efforts, but because of the items left behind by his former comrades.

One could call this a hollow shell of a guild, a relic of past glories.

—This was the incarnation of those days.

This was the Staff of Ainz Ooal Gown.

♦ ♦ ♦

He did not want to let this weapon and its memories of their golden days stay here to be a painful reminder of the past. Yet, contrary thoughts wormed their way through Momonga's heart.

Ainz Ooal Gown had always decided things by use of a majority vote. Momonga might have been the guildmaster but his job was mainly communicating with people and other minor tasks.

Because of that, now that there were no other guild members present, for the first time, Momonga thought to exercise his powers as the guild's leader.

"This is a pretty sad state of affairs."

Momonga muttered to himself as he operated his player console. He intended to equip himself in the gear that best suited the leader of a top-tier guild.

YGGDRASIL's equipment was classified according to how much data each item possessed. Items with more data were ranked higher. From the lowest to the highest rank, they were low-class, middle-class, high-class, top-class, legacy-class, relic-class, legendary-class and what Momonga was currently selecting, divine-class.

On his ten bony fingers he wore nine rings, each with a different ability. Then there was the matter of his necklace, his gloves, his cape, his shirt and his circlet, all of which were divine-class items as well. If they had a price, it would be a jaw-dropping one.

The flowing robe which covered his torso was grander than the one he had worn earlier.

A red and black aura rose slowly from beneath his feet, and at a glance it seemed extremely ominous. This aura was not the result of any skill Momonga activated. It was simply because there had been extra room in the robe's data capacity, so the special effects data for a [Disaster Aura] had been added into it. Touching that aura would not cause any harm.

In the corner of Momonga's vision, he could see various indicators which showed his stats increasing.

After changing out his gear, the fully-equipped Momonga nodded, satisfied that he looked the part of the guild's leader. Then, he reached out and grasped the Staff of Ainz Ooal Gown.

As Momonga grasped the Staff of Ainz Ooal Gown, it radiated a nimbus of reddish-black light. Tormented faces occasionally coalesced out of the roiling light, and then they crumbled and vanished again. They looked so realistic one could almost imagine them wailing in agony.

"...I wonder if they went overboard with the details."

The staff that had been made but never used had finally found its way into its rightful owner's hands, in the twilight hours of YGGDRASIL.

Momonga rejoiced as he saw his parameters rising rapidly, but at the same time he felt sad.

"Let's go, symbol of the guild. Or no — my symbol of the guild."

Part 2

Momonga left what was known as the Round Table Room.

Guild members had a ring reserved for their use. Anyone who wore that ring would automatically appear in this place when they logged into the game, barring special circumstances. If any guild members returned, they would do so in this room. However, Momonga knew that the other members of the guild would not be coming back here. In the last few minutes of the game, the only player who remained in the gigantic Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick was Momonga himself.

Momonga suppressed the emotions that were rising like a tide, and walked through the halls.

This place was like a castle built of alabaster, a magnificent world suffused with a regal atmosphere.

If one raised their head to look to the ceiling, they would see crystal chandeliers hanging from the ceiling at fixed intervals, radiating a warm light.

The broad hallways had brilliantly-polished stone floors, which reflected the light from the chandeliers in a way that made it seem like twinkling stars were embedded in its surface.

If a visitor opened the doors on both sides of him, his attention would be captivated by the decadent furnishings within.

A third party observing this scene would probably be staring in awe.

The much-hated Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick had once been attacked by the largest invading force ever assembled in the game's history. Eight guilds banded together with their allies to bring a force of over 1500 players, mercenaries and NPCs to bear on Nazarick, but in the end, they had been miserably defeated. That legendary dungeon was now reduced to this.

♦ ♦ ♦

The Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick had once been a six-floor dungeon, but it had been dramatically altered after Ainz Ooal Gown took control of it.

Currently, it was a ten-floor dungeon, and each floor had its own unique theme.

The first to third floors were modelled after a tomb. The fourth floor was an underground lake. The fifth floor was a frozen glacier. The sixth floor was a rainforest. The seventh floor was a sea of magma. The eighth floor was a wasteland. And the ninth and tenth floors were the realm of the gods — in other words, the home base of Ainz Ooal Gown, which had ranked among the top ten of YGGDRASIL's thousands of guilds.

♦ ♦ ♦

The sound of Momonga's footsteps and the tapping of his staff rang through this holy sanctuary. After turning several corners in this vast hallways, Momonga saw a woman in the distance, heading in his direction.

She was a sensual beauty, whose lush, golden hair grazed her shoulders.

She was dressed in a long, elegant maid's outfit, with a large apron.

She was roughly 170 cm tall, with a slender build. Her ample bosom looked like it would burst out of her bodice at any time. Her overall appearance was attractive and gave the impression of being graceful and kind.

As the two slowly approached each other, the maid darted to the side of the hallways and bowed deeply to Momonga.

In return, Momonga raised his hand in acknowledgement.

The maid's expression remained as it was, and she kept the same smile on her face from just now. In YGGDRASIL, facial expressions did not change, but this girl was slightly different from player characters with their unchanging expressions.

This maid was a Non-Player Character. She was not controlled by the game, but by a set of AI routines. Simply put, she was a mobile doll. Even if her design was incredibly realistic, her bow was nothing more than a programmed action.

Momonga's acknowledgement of her bow was nothing more than a foolish gesture, because she was nothing more than a doll. However, Momonga had reasons for not treating her coldly.

There were 41 maid NPCs in the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick, each with their own unique design.

Their creator was a mangaka who had broken into the industry with his maid illustrations, and who was currently serialized in a monthly magazine.

Momonga studied the maid carefully. Apart from her looks, he also scrutinized her uniform.

The intricacy of the design, especially the fine embroidery that speckled her apron, was enough to make people gasp in awe.

Their design had been exceptionally detailed because of the declaration, "Maid uniforms are their secret weapons!" Momonga couldn't help but feel nostalgic as he remembered the complaints from the other guild members who had helped with the design.

"Ah… that's right. I think it was from then that he started saying that 'Maid uniforms are justice!' Come to think of it, I think the manga he's drawing now has a maid as a main character. Do his assistants cry when he goes overboard on the designs? Ah, Whitebrim-san."

The maids' AI routines had been programmed by Herohero-san and five others.

In other words, this maid was the personification of his past friends' hard work. He could not simply ignore her without feeling bad about it. After all, this maid was also a part of the glorious history of Ainz Ooal Gown.

Just as Momonga was contemplating these matters, the maid raised her head, as though she had spotted something, and tilted her head in surprise.

The maids would do this if anyone lingered around them for longer than a certain period of time.

As Momonga searched through his memories, he could not help but be impressed by Herohero's elaborate programming. There should have been other hidden poses programmed into them as well. Momonga wanted to see them all, but time was very tight.

Momonga glanced at the translucent watch on his left wrist and checked the time.

As he thought, there was no time for him to spend waffling around.

"Thank you for your hard work."

Momonga walked past the maid after that painful farewell. As he passed the maid, there was no response, but that was only to be expected. Still, even if she did not reply to him, Momonga still felt that it had to be said, because it was the last day of YGGDRASIL.

Momonga continued forward, leaving the maid behind.

After a while, a gigantic staircase appeared before Momonga's eyes. It was wide enough that over 10 people could walk down it side by side, arms outstretched, with no problems. A luxurious red carpet lay on the steps. Momonga slowly descended the stairs, until he reached the lowest floor — the 10th floor of the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick.

The place where he had arrived was a large receiving room, with several figures within.

The first to enter Momonga's line of sight was a distinguished old gentleman in a butler's outfit.

His hair was pure white, even the beard and moustache near his mouth. However, the old man's back was ramrod-straight, like a sword forged of steel. His face was deeply wrinkled and gave onlookers the impression that he was a kind and gentle person, but his keen eyes were like those of an eagle sizing up its prey.

There were six maids standing behind the butler. However, these maids were different from the one Momonga had met earlier, in looks and equipment.

The maids wore gauntlets and greaves of gold, silver, black and other colored metals. Their armor was designed to look like the outfits of maids in manga. They did not wear helmets, but instead white headpieces. In addition, every girl was armed with a different weapon. They were the picture of battle maids.

Their hairstyles were also varied, with bunned-up hair, ponytails, long, straight hair, French curls, and so on. The one thing they had in common was that every single one of them was attractive. The exact way in which they were attractive also varied within them; one was sporty and athletic, one resembled a demure Japanese maiden, one of them had a seductive allure, and so on.

These girls were NPCs, but they were strikingly different from the other maids, who had simply been designed for entertainment. Their purpose was to defend against invaders.

♦ ♦ ♦

In a game like YGGDRASIL, guilds enjoyed several benefits if they possessed a guild base of castle-tier or higher.

One of these was NPCs for base defense.

The NPCs that the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick could field were undead monsters. These automatically spawning NPCs — or "pop monsters"

— had a maximum level of 30. Even if they were destroyed, after a while they would be respawned by themselves, at no cost to the guild.

However, players could not customize the AI and appearances of these “pop” NPCs.

As such, they were hardly useful in deterring intruders, who were universally players.

There was also another type of NPC; the ones designed from the ground up to their makers’ satisfaction. If a guild possessed a castle-grade guild base, the owning guild would be allowed 700 levels to be distributed between any number of NPCs they wanted.

Because the highest level in YGGDRASIL was 100, by those stipulations, a guild could make 5 level 100 NPCs and 4 level 50 NPCs, or any combination thereof.

When designing an original NPC, one could customize weaponry and other equipment in addition to clothing and appearances. As a result, one could create NPCs that were far stronger than the automatic spawns and place them in key locations.

Of course, not every NPC had to be designed for battle. A certain guild which called themselves the “Kitty Kingdom” fielded no NPCs other than cats or cat-related creatures.

In this way, each guild could freely determine their unique style.

♦ ♦ ♦

“Umu.”

Momonga placed his thumb on his chin, and looked at the butler and maids who were bowing to him. Momonga typically used teleportation magic to move through the various rooms, so he had not had many chances to come this way. Looking at the staff filled him with nostalgia.

He reached his hand out and touched an invisible menu, opening a page that only guild members could see. Then, he selected an option from several

choices. As he did so, the names of the butlers and maids appeared over their heads.

“I see. So that’s what they were called.”

Momonga laughed softly, at himself for forgetting their names, and also because of the fond memories they brought up in him. There had been quite a few arguments between his colleagues when they had chosen names for the NPCs.

The butler — Sebas’ — design was that of a house steward.

The six maids beside him were combat maids loyal to Sebas. Together, they were called the “Pleiades”. In addition to these maids, Sebas was also in charge of the Tomb’s manservants.

The text box for Sebas contained more detailed information, but Momonga did not feel like reading it. The servers would shut down soon and he had to go somewhere before then.

As an aside, all the NPCs apart from the maids were also very well detailed. This was because the guild members were all fans of complex backstories and details. Many of the guild members were artists and programmers, and a game like this which emphasized the customization of appearances — allowing them to indulge their desire to create and design — was a godsend to them.

Originally, Sebas and the combat maids were intended to be a last line of defense against invaders. However, if enemy players could penetrate this deeply into the tomb, they would be able to handily defeat Sebas and the maids, so they were little more than speedbumps to buy time. However, no player had ever made it this far, so they had been waiting here for orders.

Without orders, all they could do was wait for a chance to be of use.

Momonga tightened his grip on the Staff of Ainz Ooal Gown.

He knew it was foolish to feel pity for NPCs. They were nothing more than a collection of electronic data, and the closest they could come to real emotion was a very skilled set of AI routines.

However—

“As guildmaster, I shall put the NPCs to good use.”

Momonga couldn’t help but laugh at himself for that incredibly lame line, and then he gave them a command.

“Follow me.”

Sebas and the maids bowed respectfully, to show they had heard and acknowledged the order.

Leading them away from this place was not what the guild members had intended for them. Ainz Ooal Gown was a guild that respected the will of the majority. It was forbidden for an individual to selfishly manipulate the NPCs that everyone had made together.

However, this was the day when the curtains would fall on everything. Given that, everyone would probably forgive his indulgence.

As Momonga thought about this, he continued moving forward, followed by the sounds of many footsteps.

♦ ♦ ♦

Eventually, the group arrived at a vast hemispherical dome-shaped hall. Four-colored crystal lamps glittered from the ceiling, and there were 72 niches in the walls. Most of them were filled with statues.

Each statue was modelled after a demon’s appearance, and there were 67 of them.

This room was called “The Lemegeton”. It was named after the Lesser Key of Solomon, which was a magical grimoire.

The statues in the niches were designed to resemble the 72 demons mentioned in that book, and in truth they were golems, made out of extremely

rare magical alloys. There should have been 72 of them, but there were only 67, because their creator got bored of the project and quit halfway.

The four-colored crystal lamps on the ceiling were a type of monster, and the moment an enemy entered their range, they would summon high-ranking elementals of earth, water, wind and fire, in addition to bombarding them with area-of-effect attack magic.

If these crystal lamps all attacked at once, the firepower they unleashed could easily defeat two parties of level 100 players, which would be roughly 12 people.

This room could be said to be the final defensive line of the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick.

Momonga led the servants behind him past the magic circle, and laid eyes on the giant doors before him.

The majestic set of double doors were over five meters in height, and covered in intricate carvings. The left side was shaped into a beautiful goddess, while the right was made to resemble a cruel demon. So realistic was their design that even from across the room, Momonga felt like they would attack him.

Still, while the carvings looked like they could move, Momonga knew that they had never moved before.

—Since they made it all the way here, we should gather in glory and welcome these brave heroes. Let others slander us as they will, but we shall welcome them proudly and openly, like the magnanimous lords that we are.

That idea had been passed, in accordance with the majority vote rule.

“Ulbert-san…”

Ulbert Alain Odle. He was arguably the most obsessed with the idea of “evil” in the guild.

“Was it because of chuunibyou…”

Momonga felt that way as he looked around the large hall.

"...Will these two statues attack?"

He was right to feel so uneasy.

Even Momonga did not fully grasp the secrets of all the mechanisms in this dungeon. It would not be strange if one of the retired guild members had left a strange sort of present for him. And the one who had designed this set of doors was just such a person.

In the past, he had designed a very powerful golem, but shortly after activation, a flaw in the combat AI made itself known and it had attacked everyone around it.

To this day, Momonga still had his doubts about whether that "mistake" had been on purpose.

"Hey, Luci★Fer-san, if they really attack me, I'll be mad, you know."

However, Momonga's caution in reaching for the doors was unfounded. As he touched them, they opened by themselves — although, they did so slowly, in deference to their massive weight.

The air changed.

Although the atmosphere from earlier was filled with quiet solemnity, the scene before his eyes now exceeded that by far. The air became a pressure that weighed heavily on the entire body.

It was an exquisite piece of work.

And in this wide, high room —

Even packing several hundred people inside would not make the room feel crowded. The high ceiling and the surrounding walls were a predominantly white color, with golden decorations as highlights.

The numerous chandeliers which hung from the ceiling were made in precious stones of all colors of the rainbow, and they emitted a fantastic, dreamlike radiance.

Numerous flags emblazoned with different symbols hung from flagpoles sunk into the walls. A total of 41 of these flags swayed gently in the wind, from the ceiling to the floor.

In the center of this room that was tinted gold and silver, there was a flight of stairs about 10 steps high. Atop these stairs was a gigantic throne, carved out of a single piece of crystal, whose back was high enough to touch the ceiling above it. A huge red banner hung down behind it, proudly displaying the symbol of the guild.

This place was located in the deepest reaches of the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick. It was also its most important place — the Throne Room.

“Ohh…”

Even Momonga could not help but gasp at the sheer magnificence of this room. He felt that it was easily the second most impressive location in YGGDRASIL, if not the first.

This was the most suitable place for him to welcome the final moments of the game.

As Momonga advanced through the room that seemed to absorb the sounds of his footsteps, his eye fell on the female NPC that stood by the side of the throne.

She was a beautiful woman who wore a pure white dress, and the faint smile on her face was that of a goddess. In stark contrast to her dress, her hair was a flowing, lustrous jet-black that reached down to her waist.

Although her golden irises and vertically-slitted pupils were somewhat odd, apart from those she could easily be considered a world-class beauty. However, a pair of curled horns sprouted from the sides of her head. In addition, a pair of black-feathered wings emerged from her waist.

Perhaps it was because of the horns, but her divine smile seemed like a mask that concealed her true feelings.

She wore a golden necklace that was patterned after a spiderweb, which extended from her shoulders down to the tops of her breasts.

Her slender wrists were covered in a pair of lustrous silk gloves, and in her hand she held a strange weapon that looked like a wand of some sort. It was roughly 45 cm long, and a black orb hovered at its end, floating lightly in the air but holding its position at the end of the wand.

Her name, Momonga had not yet forgotten.

She was the Overseer of the Floor Guardians of the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick, Albedo. She was in charge of the seven NPC Floor Guardians. In other words, she was the highest-ranked character in the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick.

Because of that, she was permitted to await orders within the Throne Room, in the deepest reaches of the Tomb.

However, Momonga turned a sharp look on Albedo:

“I knew there was a World-Class Item here, but how is it that there are two of them here now?”

In YGGDRASIL, there were 200 ultimate items in the game, known as World-Class Items.

World-Class Items possessed unique abilities, and some of them were so balance-breaking that they could even request changes in the game’s rules from the developers. Of course, not every World-Class Item possessed such insane power.

Even so, a player who possessed even a single World-Class Item would be catapulted to the highest echelons of fame in YGGDRASIL.

Ainz Ooal Gown possessed 11 items like this, the most of any guild. Even that was far in excess of any other guild. The guild in second place only possessed three such items.

With the permission of the other guild members, Momonga was allowed to possess one of these ultimate items, and the rest of these World-Class Items were scattered throughout Nazarick. However, most of them were stored in the depths of the Treasury, defended by its Avataras.

The only reason why Albedo could possess such a rare treasure like this without Momonga’s knowledge was because the guild member who designed Albedo had given it to her.

However, since today was already the last day of the game, Momonga felt that he should respect the wishes of his comrade who had given the item to Albedo, and so he did not take further action.

“This is a good place.”

Momonga’s words were directed to Sebas and the Pleiades as they reached the base of the stairs leading to the throne.

After that, he began climbing the stairs, but stopped when he heard footsteps behind him. Momonga could not help but laugh, although his skeletal face could not show any expressions.

The NPCs were merely inflexible AI routines. If he did not give a specifically-worded command, they would not recognize it as an order. Momonga had forgotten this and thus he had not properly commanded the NPCs.

After his guild members left, Momonga had begun solo hunting by himself to a nearly ridiculous degree in order to earn the gold needed to maintain Nazarick. He did not build friendships with other players and avoided them, as well as the high-difficulty areas he used to visit when his guild members had still been around.

Then, he would deposit his earnings in the Treasury before logging out. This had been his routine for almost every day. As such, he did not have much contact with the NPCs.

“—Stand by.”

The sound of footsteps stopped.

After Momonga gave the correct command, he ascended the final steps and arrived at the throne.

He stared openly at Albedo, who stood by its side. Though he had entered this room before, he did not recall her eyes tracking him in his memories.

“What kind of backstory was she designed with?”

All Momonga knew about her character was that she was the Overseer of the Guardians, as well as the highest-ranked NPC in Nazarick.

Driven by curiosity, Momonga opened up a console and began scrolling through the details of Albedo's flavor text.

A flood of densely-packed characters filled his vision. It was like reading an ancient epic poem. If he took his time to read it in detail, he would probably still be reading until the game ended.

Momonga felt like he had stepped on a land mine. If he could move, he would be trembling now.

He wanted to scold himself for having forgotten that Albedo's creator was obsessed with this sort of thing.

However, since he had already opened it, he had no choice but to abandon his resistance and continue scrolling.

He didn't even skim the text for the important points; he simply scrolled to the bottom as fast as he could while looking at the title.

After skipping past vast expanses of text, Momonga's mind settled on the last line, and froze.

"She is also a slut."

He could not help but stare.

"...Eh? What does this mean?"

A cry of disbelief escaped Momonga's nonexistent lips. He looked the words over several more times, eyes filled with suspicion, but in the end, he could not find any other meaning to them. After several rounds of thought, he could only come to the conclusion he had started with.

"A slut… meaning she has excessive sexual desire?"

Each of the 41 guild members had designed their own NPCs, so he could not understand why anyone would want to treat the NPCs they had designed themselves in this manner. Perhaps he would understand why after reading that long essay of flavor text.

However, there were guild members who would come up with these unconventional designs.

Albedo's designer, Tabula Smaragdina, was one of those people.

"Ah, is this what they call gap moe? Tabula-san… even so…"

Isn't a backstory like this far too much?

Momonga could not help but think that. All the NPCs made by everyone were an inheritance of the guild. Designing the highest-ranked NPC Albedo in this manner made him think that Tabula Smaragdina was beyond saving.

"Umu."

Would it be fine to change an NPC's backstory based on a personal decision? After thinking about it for some time, Momonga came to a conclusion.

"Should I change it?"

Currently, with the guild weapon in his possession, Momonga could be said to be the master of the guild. It should be all right to exercise the guildmaster's authority he had never used before.

Momonga's doubts vanished like mist, as he steeled himself to right the wrongs of his guildmate.

He extended the staff of Ainz Ooal Gown that he was holding. Normally, one would need developer tools to change a character's backstory, but by through his power as guildmaster, he could directly access her settings and edit them. After some action on his console, the "slut" line vanished.

"Well, it should be like that."

Momonga thought a bit more, and looked at the gap in Albedo's flavor text.

I should probably fill that up...

"This feels a little silly."

Although he was laughing at himself, he still typed out a few words on the console keyboard. The words formed a sentence:

"She loves Momonga."

"Uwah, how embarrassing."

Momonga covered his face with his palm. It felt as though he were designing his ideal girlfriend complete with love events for himself, which embarrassed him so much that his heart began pounding. Although he wanted to rewrite it again out of shame, in the end he changed his mind and decided against it.

The game would end soon, after all, and his shame would vanish with it. Besides, the sentence he added matched the gap left by the deleted sentence exactly. It would be a shame if he deleted it and left an empty space again.

Momonga sat on the throne, scanning his surroundings with eyes filled with satisfaction and a little embarrassment. He noticed that Sebas and the maids were still standing by in a dormant state. It seemed a little lonely, and a little odd, to have them standing motionless like that.

I think there was a command for that.

Momonga recalled the words he had heard before, and extended a hand before lightly bringing it down.

"Kneel."

As one, Albedo, Sebas and the six maids fell to one knee in obeisance.

Good.

Momonga raised his left hand to check the time.

[23:55:48]

He was just in time.

In all likelihood, the GMs were probably flooding the public channels and setting off fireworks. Momonga, who had put his heart and soul into this place and cut off all contact with the outside world, was unaware of that.

Momonga leaned against the back of the throne, and slowly raised his head to look at the ceiling.

He believed that even on the last day of the game, some invaders might come to Nazarick.

He would wait for them. He would accept any challenges in his position as guildmaster.

He had sent emails to all the guild members, but only a few had come.

He would wait for them. He would welcome his comrades back in his position as guildmaster.

“A relic of the past, huh—”

Momonga sank into thought.

Although the guild now was just an empty shell, he had enjoyed his time with it.

He turned his eyes to look at the huge flags hanging from the ceiling. There were 41 of them in total, the same number as there were guild members. Each of them displayed the personal symbol of each guild member. Momonga extended a bony finger and pointed to one of them.

“Mine.”

Then, he turned his attention to a nearby flag. That flag represented one of the strongest players in Ainz Ooal Gown — no, in all of YGGDRASIL. He was the

one who had started the guild, and the one who had gathered the “Original Nine”.

“Touch Me.”

The symbol on the next flag he pointed to belonged to the oldest member of Ainz Ooal Gown, who was a lecturer in a university in real life.

“Shijuuten Suzaku.”

His finger moved faster than before as he shifted to the flag which belonged to one of the three female members of Ainz Ooal Gown.

“Ankoro Mochimochi.”

Momonga fluidly recited the names of the various symbols’ owners:
“Herohero, Peroroncino, Bukubukuchagama, Tabula Smaragdina, Warrior Takemikazuchi, Variable Talisman, Genjiro—”

It did not take long for him to name all 40 of his former comrades.

Their names were still branded deeply in Momonga’s brain.

He sprawled tiredly on the throne.

“Yeah, it really was fun…”

Even though the game did not have any subscription fees, Momonga had still spent a third of his monthly salary on it. It was not because his salary was high, but because he had no other hobbies, so he funnelled all his income into YGGDRASIL.

There was a cash gacha in the game where players could pay for a chance to win a prize. Momonga spent nearly his entire bonus on it, and barely managed to get a rare item out of the experience. When he heard that one of his guild members Yamaiko had won that item for the cost of a lunch, Momonga was so filled with jealousy that he wanted to roll around on the ground.

(TL Note: gachas are slang for game-based lotteries or lucky draws. Named after gachapons, which are coin-operated vending machines which randomly dispense a prize.)

Because almost all of Ainz Ooal Gown's members were productive members of society, most of them were willing to spend money on this hobby, and among them Momonga was one of the bigger spenders. He was probably one of the top few on the server.

That was how dedicated he was. Adventuring was fun, but his greatest joy was found in playing with his friends.

To Momonga, whose parents had passed away and who had no friends in real life, the guild Ainz Ooal Gown was a shining memory of the good times he had had with his friends.

And now, this guild would disappear.

His heart was filled with regret and reluctance.

Momonga gripped the Staff of Ainz Ooal Gown rightly. He was just an ordinary salaryman, and he lacked the financial power or connections to change that fact. He was just another player who could only watch the closing time as it approached.

The time on his watch read [23:57]. The server would shut down at 00:00.

There little time left. The virtual world would end, and he would have to go back to reality the next day.

That was only natural. Nobody could live in a virtual world, which was why everyone had left, one by one.

Momonga sighed.

He had to wake up at 4 tomorrow. He had to sleep the moment the servers shut down in order not to affect the next day's work.

[23:59:35, 36, 37]

Momonga set his watch to count out the seconds.

[23:59:48, 49, 50]

Momonga closed his eyes.

[23:59:58, 59—]

The countdown finished. He waited for the curtains to fall on his fantasy world—

He waited for the automatic logout—

[0:00:00...1,2,3]

"...Hm?"

Momonga opened his eyes.

He had not returned to his familiar room. This was still the Throne Room in YGGDRASIL.

"What's going on?"

The time was right. He should have been forcibly logged out by the server shutdown.

[0:00:38]

It was definitely past midnight. The clock could not have gone wrong because of a system error.

A confused Momonga looked around him, searching for any clues in the vicinity.

"Could it be they delayed the server shutdown—?"

Or had they extended play time as a form of compensation?

Although numerous reasons appeared in his mind, they were all far from the truth. However, the most likely reason was that an irresistible force had cropped up, and extended the server shutdown time. If that was the case, the GMs would have made an announcement. Momonga hurriedly worked to reopen the message panel he had closed — and then he stopped halfway.

There was no command console.

“What… on earth happened?”

Momonga was filled with panic, frustration and suspicion, but he was also surprised by how calm he was considering the circumstances. He decided to call on other means. Forced connections that did not require a console, the chat function, a GM call, a forced logout—

None of them responded. It was as though they had been deleted from the system.

“...What the hell is going on!”

Momonga’s angry voice echoes through the Throne Room, then vanished.

Today was the last day of YGGDRASIL, yet all these things were happening on a day that should have marked an end to the game. Was this some kind of prank they were pulling on the players?”

Momonga was quite unhappy that he could not meet the end of the game in style, and the words he muttered clearly illustrated the anger inside him. There should not have been any reply to his hostile suspicion.

—However...

“What’s wrong, Momonga-sama?”

It was the first time he had heard that beautiful woman’s voice.

Momonga was startled, but he still kept searching for the source of the voice. When he found the one who had spoken the words from just now, he was speechless.

The person who had answered him was the NPC raising her head — Albedo.

Part 3

Carne Village.

It was located on the border of the Kingdom at the Empire, near the southern tip of the Azellerisia Mountain Range, just outside a patch of woodland named the Great Forest of Tob.

For a frontier village of the Re-Estize Kingdom, its population was unexceptional — 120 souls, distributed among 25 families.

The village made its living from the resources of the forest and agriculture. Apart from doctors and herbalists who came to collect herbs, the only visitors to the village were the yearly tax collectors. Time seemed to stand still for the few residents of this village.

Village life was very busy even in the early hours of the morning. Villages did not possess the magical illumination of [Continual Light] which could be found in cities, so the villagers would rise with the sun and work hard all day until the sun went down.

The first thing Enri Emmot did after getting up extra early in the morning was to carry water from the nearby well. Hauling water was a woman's job, and once she finished filling the big water tank in the house, that chore was complete. By this time, her mother would have prepared breakfast for their family of four.

Breakfast was barley or wheat porridge, as well as cooked vegetables. Sometimes, they would have dried fruit as well.

After breakfast, she would tend the fields with her parents. Her 10 year-old sister would go into the forest to gather firewood or help with the field work.

When the bell in the middle of the village — the village square — rang to signal noon, everyone would break for lunch.

Lunch would be black bread baked several days before, as well as soup with some shredded meat jerky sprinkled in.

Field work would resume after lunch, and when the sun set they would return home for dinner.

For dinner, they would have the same black bread that they had for lunch, as well as bean soup. If the village's hunters managed to bag any prey, they might be able to get some meat to go with their dinner. After dinner, the family would gather around the light of the hearth-fire to take care of household chores, such as mending worn or damaged clothes.

They would go to sleep around 8.

The girl Enri Emmot was born 16 years ago and had become a part of the village since then. She had lived these days all her life. In her heart, she wondered: *how much longer will these unchanging days continue?*

♦ ♦ ♦

Today was no different from any other. After waking up, Enri went to the well to carry water.

After filling her buckets at the well, she would need three trips to fill the house's water tank.

"Yosh~"

Enri rolled up her sleeves, exposing her untanned skin, which was pale and stood out. Long years of farm life ensured that although her arms looked slender and frail, they were actually very strong, with just a hint of muscle on them.

The filled buckets were very heavy, but Enri hoisted them up like she always did.

If the buckets were bigger, I could make fewer trips, wouldn't that make things easier? Then again, if the buckets were bigger, I probably wouldn't be able to lift them…

As Enri thought about that issue on her way back home, she heard a sound and turned to look at it. There was tension in the air over there, and the seeds of fear began sprouting in her heart.

Her ears seemed to pick up something like wood being broken, and after that—

"A scream—?"

It sounded like a strangled bird, but it was definitely not a bird's call.

A chill ran down Enri's spine. Unbelievable. There must be some kind of mistake. It couldn't be a human's voice. She tried to erase her unease with these thoughts, and then they vanished.

She had to run to the source of the scream, because it was coming from the direction of her home.

Enri cast aside the water buckets. She could not run while carrying that heavy burden.

Although she nearly tripped over her long skirt, she managed to keep her balance by some stroke of luck.

The sound rang through the air once more.

Enri's heart lurched in her chest.

There was no mistake about it — it was a human scream.

She ran, and ran, and ran.

Enri could not recall going faster than this in her life. She was running so fast that her legs were about to tangle each other up.

The neighs of horses. The screams of people, and shouts.

These sounds were becoming clearer and clearer.

In the distance, Enri could see an unfamiliar man in armor swinging his sword at a villager.

The villager collapsed to the ground with a howl of pain, like a puppet whose strings had been cut, and a swift thrust from the sword dealt him a fatal blow.

“Morga-san…”

There were no strangers in a small village like this. Everyone was as close as kin. As such, Enri knew exactly who had been killed before her eyes.

Mr. Morga was a loud but pleasant man. He had done nothing wrong, and did not deserve to die like this. Enri wanted to stop — but in the end she gritted her teeth and ran on.

The distance that felt fairly close while carrying water now felt like an endless stretch. As the sounds of shouts and cursing filtered into her ears, she finally saw her home before her.

“Dad! Mom! Nemu!”

Enri opened the door as she shouted for her family.

She found three familiar faces with unfamiliar looks of fear. They were motionless. However, when Enri opened the door and entered, their faces softened, the fear replaced by relief.

“Enri! Are you all right?”

Her father hugged her in his strong arms, which were brawny and tough from field work.

“Ahhh, Enri…”

Her mother’s gentle arms embraced her.

“Good, Enri’s back, then we’d better flee too!”

The Emmot family was in grave danger. They had stayed at home because they were worried about leaving Enri behind, and so they had missed the best chance to escape. The threat to their lives would be catching up with them any moment now.

As she thought about that fear, it became a reality.

Just as the family was about to run, a human figure appeared in the house’s doorway. The man silhouetted by sunlight, glittered. He was a fully-armored knight whose breastplate bore the insignia of the Baharuth Empire. He held a longsword in his hand.

The Baharuth Empire was a neighbor of the Re-Estize Kingdom, and the two of them had waged frequent wars against each other. Until recently, the flames of war were mostly limited to the region around the Fortress City of E-Rantel, and had not spread to this village.

However, the quiet life they had enjoyed would end here.

Enri could feel the man’s cold eyes on her from between the vision slits of his helmet, as though he were counting up how many people were in Enri’s family. It frightened her.

The knight clenched the gauntlet holding his sword, and a creaking sound came from where metal rubbed against metal.

And then, just as he was about to enter the house—

“Uooooh!”

“Nuuuu!”

—Her father lunged at the man, tackling him out of the doorway and out of the house with his momentum.

“Hurry up and run!”

“Damn you!”

Blood streamed from a small cut on her father’s face. He must have gotten hurt while bull-rushing the knight.

Enri’s father was rolling around as he grappled with the knight on the ground. The knight grabbed the hand of Enri’s father which was holding a knife, while he in turn kept the knight from drawing his shortsword.

The sight of blood on the body of one of her family members made Enri’s mind go white. She wavered over whether to help her father or run away.

“Enri! Nemu!”

Her mother’s shouts helped Enri regain herself, and as she looked at her mother, she saw the older woman shaking her head, with a heart-breaking expression on her face.

Enri grabbed her little sister’s hand and ran after her mother with big strides. Guilt and hesitation clawed at her heart, but in the end, she knew they had to flee into the Great Forest of Tob.

The neighing of horses, angry shouts, the clash of steel, and the stench of burning flesh.

All these assaulted Enri’s ears and nose from the direction of the village. Where had it come from? Enri ran with all her might as she tried to make sense of matters. When fleeing to an open space, she had to make her body as small as possible, or hide in the corners of houses.

The violent beating of her heart chipped away at the fear that threatened to freeze her body solid. In addition, the small hand she held in hers spurred her on.

—Her sister.

Her mother, who was running ahead of her, suddenly froze, and immediately doubled back, her hands frantically gesturing at them to run somewhere else.

As Enri realized why her mother would do that, she bit her lip, and forced back her tears.

She clenched her little sister's hand and ran, trying desperately to get away from here, because she did not want to see what would happen next.

Part 4

"Is something wrong, Momonga-sama?"

Albedo kept asking him questions. Momonga did not know how to respond. As it was, there were far too many things he did not understand, so his thought processes short-circuited.

"Forgive me."

Momonga could only stare dumbly at Albedo, who was standing by his side.

"Are you all right?"

Albedo's beautiful face drew close to Momonga's as she studied him. A faint fragrance entered his nostrils. The scent seemed to restore Momonga's ability to think, and his mind, which had been hitherto out of comission, slowly returned to normal.

"No… nothing is wrong… No, nothing."

Momonga was not the sort of person who made a habit of speaking politely to dolls. However… hearing Albedo's questions instinctively made him want to respond with deference. Her movements, her speech patterns, her whole being radiated an undeniable humanity.

Momonga still had the feeling that something was terribly wrong about Albedo and himself, but he had no way of understanding exactly what the problem was. All he could do in this ignorant state was to suppress his fear, shock and other unnecessary emotions. However, Momonga was a common person, and could not do that.

Just as Momonga was about to cry out, the words of one of his guild members came to mind:

—Panic is the seed of defeat, so you must maintain your calm and think logically. Remain calm, look beyond your surroundings, and don't waste your effort on unnecessary details, Momonga-san.

As he recalled these words, Momonga slowly regained his composure.

Momonga silently thanked Punitto Moe, the Zhuge Liang of Ainz Ooal Gown.

"Is something the matter?"

She was close to him now. Albedo was so close he could feel her gentle breaths. Her lovely face dimpled in an adorable way as she asked her question. Momonga, who had calmed himself after much effort, was in danger of being driven into panic again from her nearby face.

"...The GM Call function does not seem to work."

Entranced by Albedo's limpid eyes, Momonga could not help but question the NPC.

In Momonga's past life, he had not received romantic attention from the opposite sex, let alone those of a sexual nature. Although he knew that she was just an NPC, he could not help but be moved by her realistic expressions and movements.

However, as his passions stirred within his heart, they were quenched like they had been earlier, and he returned to normal.

Momonga felt uneasy at the lack of strong emotions within himself, and he wondered if it was related to the words of his comrade from just now.

But was that really the case?

Momonga shook his head. Now was not the time to ponder these things.

"...Please forgive my inability to answer the Supreme One's questions about this 'GM Call'. I apologize for not meeting your expectations. Nothing would please me more than a chance to make up for my prior mistake. Please, command me as you see fit."

...The two of them were conversing. There was no doubt about that.

Learning this fact shocked Momonga so greatly that he could not speak.

Impossible. This should have been impossible.

The closest thing NPCs could come to conversations was with macroed responses to being addressed in a certain way. There was audio data for roars and cheering for players to download, but actually allowing an NPC to engage in conversation was an impossible task. Even Sebas from just now could only accept simple orders.

Why had such an impossible event occurred? Was this phenomenon limited to Albedo?

Momonga dismissed Albedo with a wave of the hand, and disappointment flashed across her face as she retreated. Momonga turned his eyes from her body to the butler and the six maids, whose heads were still lowered.

"Sebas! Maids!"

"Yes!"

Their voices chorused out as one, and then the butler and maids raised their heads.

"Approach the throne."

"Understood."

They responded as one, and then rose to their feet. After that, they proudly strode to the front of the throne before dropping to one knee and lowering their heads again.

Momonga had learned two things from this.

The first was that he did not need to specially enter commands on a keyboard; the NPCs would understand his intentions and execute his orders.

The second was that Albedo was not the only one who could speak.

At the very least, all the NPCs in this room were exhibiting anomalous behavior.

As Momonga thought about this, he suddenly felt that there was something very wrong about himself and Albedo. In order to discover exactly what that something was, he fixed Albedo with a piercing gaze.

"—I-Is something wrong? Have I made a mistake…?"

"...!"

As he finally realized what the problem was, he did not shout, nor did he keep silent, but he simply sighed imperceptibly.

That unexpected breadth of facial expressions. The reason why her mouth could move and why she could speak—

"...pos...sible!"

Momonga hurriedly placed a hand on his mandible, and spoke.

—His mouth was moving.

This should have been impossible, going by what he knew about DMMORPGs. A character's mouth would not move with their words.

The basic premise was that external appearances were fixed. Because of that, facial expressions were impossible to design.

In addition, Momonga's face was a skull, without a tongue or a throat. He looked down to his hands, and they were the same fleshless pair that he was

used to. He could also see that he had no lungs or indeed, any other internal organs. But then, how was he speaking?

“Impossible…”

Momonga could feel the certainty he had in the world evaporating away, replaced by an ever-growing uneasiness. He suppressed his desire to shout out. and like he expected, his surging emotions were suddenly quashed.

Momonga slapped forcefully at the throne, but as he expected, no damage values appeared.

“...What should I do… Is there anything I can do?”

He knew nothing about what was going on. Nobody would help him even if he got angry.

Then, his first priority should be — looking for clues.

“—Sebas.”

He could see an earnest, sincere expression on Sebas’ face. He looked like a real person.

It should be fine to give him orders, right? Although he had no idea what would happen, he could assume all the NPCs in the Tomb were loyal to him, right? For all he knew, the people in front of him might not be the NPCs that everyone had made together.

Numerous questions rose up in his mind, floating on a sea of uneasiness, but Momonga forced aside all these emotions. In the end, the only choice he had for reconnaissance was Sebas. He glanced briefly to Albedo, but then Momonga steeled himself and decided to order Sebas out.

The mental image of a department chief giving orders to his subordinates appeared in his mind. Momonga took on a superior, commanding attitude, and spoke:

“Exit the Tomb and investigate the surrounding region. If you encounter intelligent creatures, interact peacefully with them and invite them to the Tomb. Attempt to accommodate the other party as much as possible during negotiations. Do not stray more than one kilometer from the tomb and avoid unnecessary combat.”

“Understood, Momonga-sama. I will do so immediately.”

In YGGDRASIL, NPCs made to protect a guild base could not leave it under any circumstances. However, it would seem this ironclad restriction had been overturned.

No, he could only be certain of that once Sebas returned.

“...Select one of the Pleiades to accompany you. If battle begins, retreat immediately and convey everything you have learned.”

That was simply the first step.

Momonga let go of the Staff of Ainz Ooal Gown.

The staff did not fall onto the ground, but floated in the air as though someone were still holding it. This was in complete defiance of physics, but it was a common sight in the game. There were quite a few items in YGGDRASIL which would continue floating in the air when left unattended.

The aura of tormented spirits seemed to cling to Momonga’s hand as he let the staff go, but Momonga paid it no heed. He was long since used to that sight...or not, but because he thought huge orders like these would not be unusual, Momonga deactivated the aura with a wave of his fingers.

Momonga grabbed his head in both hands.

The next step would be—

“...I should contact the game company.”

The game company would know the most about Momonga’s present situation.

The problem was actually contacting them. Normally, simply using the /shout command or a GM call would put him in touch with a GM instantly, but if these methods did not work either...

"[Message]?"

This was a spell used to communicate in the game.

Normally, its use was restricted to certain places and conditions, but perhaps he might be able to make good use of this spell in this current situation. The problem was that this spell was originally designed to communicate with other players, so it might not be able to reach a GM.

And in this extraordinary situation, there was no guarantee that the spell would work either.

"...However…"

He had to give it a try.

Momonga was a level 100 spellcaster. If he could not cast spells, his mobility, his ability to gather information, and of course his fighting power would plummet drastically. In these unknown circumstances, he had to verify that he could use magic, and quickly.

Now where can I go to test my magic... As Momonga thought about that question, he looked slowly around the Throne Room and then shook his head.

Although this was an emergency situation, he had no desire to conduct magical experiments in this quiet, almost sacred Throne Room. He contemplated suitable locations for magical testing, and then a promising location appeared in his mind.

In addition to his own abilities, he wanted to confirm one more thing.

He wanted to make sure of his authority. He had to know whether his powers and privileges as the guildmaster of Ainz Ooal Gown still existed.

Until now, all the NPCs he had met were loyal to him. However, in the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick, there were several NPCs on par with him. He had to make sure they were still loyal.

However —

Momonga glanced at the kneeling Sebas and the maids, and then at Albedo beside him.

Albedo was smiling. It was a beautiful smile, but it seemed to be concealing something else behind it. As he wondered what that "something else" might be, unease crept through Momonga.

The NPCs were loyal to him, but would they stay that way? If this were in the real world, subordinates would no longer be loyal to superiors who constantly screwed up. Would the NPCs be that way as well? Or was it that once they were programmed to be loyal, they would stay that way forever?

If their loyalty to him wavered, how should he regain it?

Rewards? There was vast wealth in the Treasury. Although it pained him to expend the treasures left behind by his former comrades, they would probably understand if it was for the sake of Ainz Ooal Gown. The question would then be how large of a reward he should give.

In addition, was he superior to others by virtue of being higher-ranked?. But what criteria could he use to quantify his superiority? He was not clear about that yet. He had the feeling that as long as he kept this dungeon going, he would eventually come to understand these things.

Or did that mean—

"—Power?"

He opened his left hand and gripped the Staff of Ainz Ooal Gown that sailed into his grasp.

"Overwhelming power?"

The seven gems set into the staff gleamed brightly, as though imploring their master to use their colossal might.

"...Forget it, I'll take my time to think about that later."

Momonga released the staff he held, and the wavering staff fell to the ground as though it were angry at him.

In any case, as long as he acted the part of the leader, they would probably not raise their hands against him right away. Be it among animals or humans, enemies would probably not attack if their intended prey did not reveal any weaknesses.

Momonga declared in a powerful voice:

"Pleiades. Apart from the maid selected to accompany Sebas, the rest of you will head to the 9th Floor and repel any invaders from the 8th Floor."

"Understood, Momonga-sama."

The maids behind Sebas acknowledged his orders respectfully.

"Begin immediately."

"Understood, my master!"

Once more the chorus of voices rang out. Sebas and the maids bowed once more to their lord who sat upon the throne, then stood and left simultaneously.

The giant doors opened, and then closed again.

Sebas and the maids vanished beyond the doors.

It was good that they had not replied with a "No" or something similar.

A great weight seemed to lift off Momonga's chest, and at the same time he looked at the person who had stayed by his side. That person was Albedo, who had stood by, awaiting orders.

She smiled, and asked him, “Then, Momonga-sama, what will you have me do next?”

“Ah, ahhh… got it.”

Momonga rose from the throne to retrieve his staff, and as he did that, he spoke:

“Come to me.”

“Yes.”

The smiling Albedo drew closer. Although Momonga was wary of the black wand and orb she had been carrying, that caution passed in an instant, and he decided to temporarily ignore its existence. Just as Momonga finished thinking that, Albedo was close enough that he could embrace her if he wanted.

She smells nice — wait, what am I thinking.

Momonga cast out the thoughts which had rose up inside him again. Now was not the time for fooling round.

He reached out his hand to touch Albedo’s.

“…mf.”

“Hm?”

A pained expression flickered across Albedo’s face. Momonga drew his hand away, like he had received an electric shock.

What’s this? Did I make her feel uncomfortable?

Several bad memories ran through his mind — like being hit by loose change that fell from the sky — but in the end Momonga found his answer.

“…Ah—”

Overlords required levels in the Elder Lich racial class, and among the abilities Elder Liches possessed was the ability to inflict negative energy damage on anything they touched. Was that the reason?

Although, even if it really was the reason, he still had some questions to ask.

In YGGDRASIL, the monsters and NPCs that appeared in the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick would be recognized as belonging to the Ainz Ooal Gown faction. Since every member of the guild was also flagged as belonging to Ainz Ooal Gown, there should be no problems even if they attacked each other.

Could it be that she no longer belongs to our guild? Or has friendly fire been enabled?

The latter possibility was more likely.

With that conclusion in mind, Momonga apologized to Albedo.

“Forgive me. I forgot to deactivate my negative energy touch skill.”

“Please pay it no heed, Momonga-sama. That damage hardly counted as damage. And as long as it were Momonga-sama, I would gladly endure any kind of — kya!”

“Ah… mm. Is… that so… No, no, I must still apologize.”

Momonga was caught off-guard by Albedo’s adorable yelp and the way she shyly covered her face, and his reply ended up being less dignified than he had hoped for.

So it was due to the negative energy touch after all.

Momonga turned his eyes from Albedo, who was going on and on about how this was nothing compared to the pain of losing her virginity, and began thinking about how to temporarily deactivate the always-on skill — and then he suddenly knew how to do it.

To Momonga, who wielded the power of an Overlord, it was as simple and natural as breathing.

He could not help but laugh at the strange situation he found himself in. After all the shocks and surprises he had received so far, this was hardly worth panicking about. It was frightening how well he had adapted to his condition.

“I’m going to touch you.”

“Ah.”

After deactivating the skill, he touched Albedo’s hand. Thoughts like “her hand’s so slim”, “her skin’s so white” and so on raced through his head, but he cast aside these male desires and focused on one thing — the pulse at her wrist.

— It was there.

It was a steady rhythm, *lub-dub, lub-dub.* She was a living being, so it was only natural.

Yes, she was alive.

Momonga released her hand and looked at his own arms. All he saw was an expanse of polished white bone, bereft of skin or flesh. Because he had no blood vessels, he could not feel a heartbeat. Indeed, an Overlord was an undead creature, a being that had transcended mortality itself, so obviously it would not have a heartbeat.

He shifted his gaze to Albedo.

Momonga saw himself reflected within Albedo’s moist golden eyes. Her cheeks were pink, probably because her body was rapidly heating up. The changes in her body surprised him.

“...What’s this?”

Is she not an NPC? Is she not pure electronic data? Why does she feel like a real person? What kind of AI could do this? More importantly, why is it that YGGDRASIL feels like the real world...

Impossible.

Momonga shook his head in denial. There was no way such a fantastic scenario could have occurred. But once the idea took root, it was not easy to eradicate. Momonga was not sure how to proceed given the changes in Albedo.

The next step… yes, the final step. If he could confirm that, then all of his predictions would be vindicated. Was this real life, or was this just fantasy?

He had to do this. If she attacked him with that weapon of hers, it could not be helped.

"Albedo… I, may I touch your breasts?"

"Eh?"

The air between them seemed to freeze.

Albedo's eyes went wide.

A wave of depression washed over Momonga as he considered his words.

"I have to do this", what the hell was he thinking, saying that to a woman? He wanted to scream "Despicable!" at the top of his voice. Indeed, using one's superior position to commit sexual harassment was the most despicable thing imaginable.

But he had no choice. Indeed, he had to do this.

As Momonga convinced himself with all his strength, his composure gradually returned to him. Resuming the air of a proper ruler, he continued forcefully:

"That... should be fine, right?"

It was not fine at all.

In contrast to Momonga's nervous request, Albedo seemed to be overflowing with joy. She gave him a glittering smile.

"But of course, Momonga-sama. Please, help yourself."

Albedo straightened herself up, presenting her ample twin peaks for Momonga's inspection. If he still had saliva, he would have swallowed several times by now.

Her breasts swelled up through her dress. And now, he was going to touch them.

On the other side of his abnormal tension and nervousness, a quiet, calm part of Momonga's brain was observing his own actions. He noted how foolish he was, and wondered why he had thought of this, and why he was still going to follow through anyway.

He sneaked a peek at Albedo, and found that her eyes were shining, jiggling her bosom as though to say "hurry up and touch me".

Not knowing whether it was because of excitement or embarrassment, Momonga steadied his hands with sheer force of will, steeled his resolve, and reached out.

The first thing Momonga felt was something hard under the dress, followed by a soft, yielding sensation.

"Fuahh.. haaa..."

As Albedo moaned wetly, Momonga completed yet another experiment.

If his brain was normal, there were two possible explanations for his present situation.

The first was that this was a new DMMORPG. That was to say, the moment YGGDRASIL had shut down, a new game, "YGGDRASIL II", had immediately taken its place.

However, in light of this experiment, the probability of that being the case was vanishingly small.

This was because R-18 actions were strictly forbidden in these games. Who knew, perhaps even R-15 actions might be banned as well. Violators would be publicly listed on the game's official website, and their accounts would be deleted, or worse.

Once the records of these R-18 actions were publicly released, they might be punished for damaging moral culture and thus violating the Social Order Maintenance Act. As such, most people would consider these acts off-limits.

If they were still in a game world, the company should have made it impossible for players to do such things. If the GMs and the game companies were watching, they would have prevented Momonga from performing lewd actions. However, there was no sign of any resistance or opposition.

In addition, one of the fundamental rulings which pertained to DMMORPGS was that forcing a player to participate in a game without permission could be treated as a form of cyber-kidnapping.

As such, forcing a player to test out a game in this manner was a prosecutable offense, especially if there was no way to force-quit the game. It would not be unexpected for a company to receive fines or jail time for such things. If a situation arose where a player was not able to log out of the game, up to a week's worth of game activity could be stored in a legally-mandated record, which would make it easy to prosecute the company for their violations of the law.

Therefore, if Momonga did not report to work for a week, someone would have found it strange and come to his house to check on him. Then all the police would need to do was to access the records with a specialized console and the problem would be solved.

Which company would risk arrest or worse to commit a corporate crime like this? Of course, they could try to muddy the waters by saying "this was a closed beta test for YGGDRASIL II", or "there were third-party programs used

here". But in truth, such a risky matter would have no benefits at all for the game company.

That being the case, the only answer for his present circumstances would be that a third party was doing something here, and it had nothing to do with the game company. If that was the case, he would need to throw out all his previous theories and think in other directions, otherwise he would never find the answer.

The problem was that he had no idea where to start. And there was another possibility...

...The possibility that the virtual world had become reality.

Impossible.

Momonga promptly rejected that idea. How could such an illogical, foolish thing happen?

But on the flip side, the more he thought about it, the more strongly he felt it was the right answer.

And then — Momonga remembered Albedo's scent.

In accordance to the software legislation for virtual reality games, such games were not allowed to provide sensory data for smell and taste. Although YGGDRASIL had food and drink items, consuming them was little more than changing a value in the game system. In addition, the sense of touch was heavily limited, in order to prevent confusion with the real world. These limitations meant that VR systems were not very useful for the sex industry.

However, none of these limitations were in effect now.

Realizing these facts shocked Momonga. Countless questions like "What about tomorrow's work?", "What'll happen if this keeps up?" flashed through his mind, but then he cast them all to the back of his mind.

"...If this virtual world is just a simulation of the real world… then the quantity of data involved must be unimaginable…"

Momonga swallowed with a nonexistent throat. Though his mind could not comprehend the situation, his heart could.

His hands finally left Albedo's ample bosom.

He realised that he had been groping her for a long time, but Momonga justified it to himself by saying that he had no choice but to grope her for that long, and it was definitely not because squeezing her supple flesh felt so good that he reluctantly let go of her… or something.

"Sorry, Albedo."

"Fuahh…"

A sensual moan came from the red-faced Albedo, and he could practically feel her body heat raising the surrounding temperature. After that, she shyly asked Momonga:

"Will I have my first time here?"

Momonga was caught off guard by her question, and before he could think clearly, he replied:
"...Eh?"

His mind was suddenly frozen, and was unable to parse her question,

First time? What's that? What's this all about? And why does she look so shy?

"May I ask how you wish to dispose of my clothes?"

"...Wha?"

"Would it be better if I disrobed myself? Or would you like to unwrap me, Momonga-sama? Or if we did it while I was wearing the dress, afterwards… it would get dirty… no, if you want me to wear this dress, I have no objections, Momonga-sama."

His brain finally managed to make sense of Albedo's words. Although, whether there really was a brain under that skull remained to be seen.

As Momonga realized why Albedo had this reaction, an immense struggle took place within himself before he finally said:

"Enough, that's all for now, Albedo."

"Eh? I understand."

"Now is not the time for… no, there's no time for that sort of thing."

"My, my apologies! I allowed myself to be ruled by my desires despite the urgency of the situation!"

With a swift movement, Albedo made to genuflect in apology, but Momonga stopped her:

"No, all this is my fault. I forgive you, Albedo. But other than this… I have an order."

"Please give me any command you desire."

"Tell the Guardians of each Floor, with the exception of the 4th and the 8th Floors, to meet at the Colosseum on the 6th Floor in an hour's time. I will contact Aura and Mare myself, so there is no need to inform them."

"Understood. Allow me to repeat the order; aside from Aura and Mare of the 6th Floor, I am to inform all the Floor Guardians to meet one hour later at the Colosseum."

"Correct. Go."

"Yes."

Albedo swiftly departed the Throne Room.

As he watched the retreating Albedo, Momonga let himself sigh, in a way that suggested he was thoroughly exhausted. Once she left the Throne Room, Momonga groaned painfully:

"...Oh, what have I done? It was supposed to be a silly joke… If I'd known I wouldn't have done it. I've… I've soiled the NPC Tabula Smaragdina-san created…"

When he thought about it, there was only one reason why Albedo would react like she had.

It must have been when he was editing her backstory, and changed that line to "She is in love with Momonga."

That must have been why she acted that way.

"...ah… shit!"

Momonga muttered to himself, thinking about how Tabula Smaragdina had painstakingly created his masterpiece Albedo out of whole cloth, and then someone else had splashed paint all over his work at will, and now she had become like this.

The knowledge that he had ruined someone else's hard work made him feel miserable.

However, the frowning Momonga — although it could not be seen because he was a skeleton — eventually rose from the Throne.

Momonga told himself that he had to leave this at the back of his mind. After the important things were taken care of, he could agonize over it later.

第二章 樓層守護者

Overlord Volume 1

CHAPTER 2

FLOOR GUARDIANS

Part 1

"To me, Demons of the Lemegeton!"

The golems made of rare metals heeded Momonga's command and moved before him with an agility that belied their heavy bodies, then took the ready stance they had assumed earlier.

Now that Momonga had decided to go with his theory that virtual reality had become reality, his first concern was to guarantee his own safety. Although the NPCs he had met so far had readily obeyed him, there was no guarantee that the others he met would react in the same way. Also, even if they were all friendly, he did not know when danger would next appear.

Momonga's life and death hinged on whether or not he could use such things as Nazarick's facilities, the golems, his items, his magic and so on.

"Well, that's one problem solved," Momonga muttered to himself in relief as he looked at the golems. He then ordered them only to listen to him. That way, even in the worst-case scenario — if one or more NPCs revolted — he would have an ace in the hole.

Momonga, satisfied with the mighty-looking golems, looked down at his bony hands.

He wore nine rings on his ten fingers, and only his left ring finger was bare.

In YGGDRASIL, most of the time one could only wear two rings, one on each hand. However, Momonga had used permanent cash items (which were very expensive) to let him wear a full ten rings, one on each finger, and use all their powers at once.

This was not unique to Momonga; most players who valued power would spend that money too.

One of the nine rings Momonga wore had an emblem on it which resembled the symbol embroidered onto the large red banner behind the throne.

That ring was called the Ring of Ainz Ooal Gown.

Every member of Ainz Ooal Gown possessed the magic ring that Momonga wore on his right ring finger.

Although he could use the power of ten rings at once with the aid of cash items, when he applied the cash item, he had to decide which ring he wanted to assign to which finger, and that decision was irrevocable. Even so, Momonga had removed the ring on his left ring finger and sent it to the Treasury. The reason why Momonga had assigned that somewhat weaker ring to that finger was because it would be very useful under certain circumstances, but he rarely wore it because it had a constant effect.

The power of the Ring of Ainz Ooal Gown was unlimited teleportation between named rooms of the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick, and it would even allow one to teleport into the Tomb from the outside. Since Nazarick was warded to block teleportation into or within itself (except for a few specific areas), this ring was very handy.

The only places where this ring could not teleport its wearer was to the Throne Room and the various guild members' personal rooms. This ring was also required to enter the Treasury, which was why he could not do without it.

Momonga sighed deeply.

After this, he would be using the ring's power. He was not sure if the ring could still do everything he expected of it, but he had no choice except to test it out.

As he unleashed the ring's power — the world before him instantly turned black.

Right after that, the scenery in front of him changed, and his surroundings were now a dark tunnel. At the end of the tunnel he could see what looked like a giant lowered portcullis. Within the tunnel were artificial lights.

“It worked…”

Momonga muttered to himself, relieved at the successful teleport.

He walked down the wide and high passage, toward the portcullis ahead of him.

The stone floor amplified the sound of Momonga’s footsteps, and at times he could hear echoes.

The torches that lined the tunnel flickered constantly, and as a result, the shadows they made seemed to dance. Bathed in the light of several torches, he cast several shadows at once, and it seemed as though there were multiple Momongas.

What passed for his nose should have been little more than an empty hole in his skull, but yet he smelled something as he drew near the portcullis. Momonga stopped and took a deep breath. It was a strong scent of earth and grass — the smell of the jungle.

Much like his encounter with Albedo just now, the intensely realistic scent, in a world that should not have possessed such things, only convinced Momonga of the reality of the world he was in.

But how did his body breathe, without lungs or a windpipe?

Momonga felt that thinking too much about such things was foolish, and put it aside.

As though it sensed Momonga approaching, the portcullis swiftly raised itself into the ceiling at just the right moment to let him through. Past the barrier, what Momonga saw was a circular arena, surrounded on all sides by many tiers of audience seats.

The colosseum was oval in shape, 180 meters on its long axis and 150 meters on the short axis. It was 40 meters tall and modelled after the arenas of the Roman Empire.

[Continual Light] spells were cast everywhere, illuminating the grounds in white light, so one could observe the entire Colosseum like it was day.

The audience was composed of many clay dolls — golems, in other words —, which showed no sign of activity.

In this Colosseum, the intruders would be the stars of the show, while the ones watching from the VIP box would be members of Ainz Ooal Gown. The main event, of course, would be a brutal melee. Apart from the 1500-man invasion, every single invader had met their end here.

Momonga walked into the center of the arena, and looked into the sky. What he saw was a black expanse of night sky. Perhaps he might have been able to see the stars if there were no light around him.

However, this place was the 6th floor of the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick, so the sky there was merely a virtual imitation.

Even that imitation required a massive amount of data, but as a result the sky here could change with the time of day, even showing an actual sun with appropriate daylight effects.

Momonga could relax himself in this virtual landscape because Momonga's heart remained that of a human, as opposed to his skeletal appearance. It was also because he felt a sense of appreciation for his comrades' hard work in building this place.

Part of him wanted to just wait and space out here, but the present situation denied him that luxury.

Momonga looked around — nobody was there. The twins should have been minding this place...

He noticed something.

“Tooooooh!”
After the shout, a figure leapt from the VIP box.

The figure jumped down from a height of about six storeys, somersaulted in mid-air, and landed as though it were a butterfly descending on a flower. There was no magic involved, only pure physical prowess.

It negated the force of the impact with a simple flexing of the knees, and it smiled broadly.

“V!”

It made a V-sign of victory.

A child of about 11 had descended from above. Her face bore a smile that was as bright as the sun. She was adorable, with the androgynous appeal of both a boy and a girl.

Her hair resembled threads of spun gold, and it grazed her shoulders. The light reflected off the strands of hair resembled an angel’s halo. Her mismatched eyes, one blue, one red, seemed as eager and sparkly as a puppy’s.

Her ears were long, and his skin was dark. She was a Dark Elf, a species related to Forest Elves.

She wore a shirt of light leather armor, reinforced with red dragon’s scales. The emblem of AInz Ooal Gown was proudly displayed on her vest, stitched in gold onto a white background. Below that, she wore a pair of white pants, matching her vest. A necklace with a glittering golden acorn pendant hung from her neck, and she wore a pair of gloves reinforced with plates of enchanted metal.

A whip coiled across her waist and right shoulder, and there was a longbow on her back. The bowstave and grip seemed to be covered in strange decorations.

“Aura, is it?”

Momonga spoke the name of the Dark Elf child.

He was addressing the Guardian of the 6th Floor of the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick, Aura Bella Fiora. She was a skirmisher who was also able to summon and tame beasts.

Aura jogged over to Momonga. Well, to her, it was a jogging pace, but she was travelling as fast as one of his beasts at full speed, rapidly closing the distance between them.

Aura screeched to a halt.

Her running shoes had hihiirokane metal plates on the soles, and they threw up clouds of dust as they ground against the floor of the arena. The clouds did not touch Momonga's body; if she had planned that, then his skills must have been impressive indeed.

"Huu~"

Aura was not sweating, but yet she wiped her forehead theatrically. Then, with a puppy-like smile, she greeted Momonga.

"Welcome, Momonga-sama. Welcome to the level I guard!"

The greeting was filled with the same respect that Albedo, Sebas and the maids had for him, but for some reason it felt more intimate. To Momonga, this intimacy allowed him to loosen up. Being too uptight and scary was quite troublesome for Momonga, who was not experienced with this sort of thing.

He could not detect any hostility on Aura's face, and his [Enemy Scan] revealed nothing.

Momonga's line of sight left the band on his right wrist and he loosened his grip on the Staff of Ainz Ooal Gown.

He had planned to strike hard and fade away if an emergency occurred, but it seemed as though there would be no need for that.

"...Mm. I'll be intruding for a while."

“What’re you saying, You are the master of Nazarick, the Supreme Overlord, right, Momonga-sama? There’s no place you’d be intruding if you visited!”

“I see… speaking of which, if you’re here, Mare…”

Upon hearing Momonga’s question, Aura blinked in surprise, as though she had realised some great truth and turned around, shouting loudly upward:

“Momonga-sama has graced us with his presence! How rude are you going to be by not showing your face to him?!”

There was movement in the shadows of the VIP box.

“Was Mare there too?”

“Yes, that’s right, Momonga-sama. He’s really timid… Oi, jump down here now!”

An almost inaudible reply came from the VIP box. Judging by the distance between there and here, it was a miracle the other party could even hear Aura. However, that miracle was the result of the magic on Aura’s necklace.

“I, I can’t, onee-chan…”

Aura took a deep breath and grabbed her head.

“He… he… Momonga-sama, he’s just scared, he’s definitely not trying to insult you.”

As a member of society, one had to know when to speak one’s heart and when to say things that were appropriate for the occasion. Momonga nodded and answered in a gentle way to put Aura at ease.

“Of course, Aura. I have never doubted your loyalty.”

Aura sighed in relief, and then she became serious again before shouting angrily at the VIP box.

“The Supreme Being Ainz-sama has come to visit us, but you as a Floor Guardian aren’t even here to meet him! You should know how disrespectful that is! If you’re too scared to jump down, maybe a quick kick will substitute for courage!”

“Uuu… I’ll take the stairs down…”

“How long do you want Ainz-sama to wait?! Get over here now!”

“I, I got it… e-eiii!”

Mare had gathered up his courage, but his voice still seemed unsteady. After that, a figure jumped out of the VIP box.

As expected, it was a Dark Elf. This Dark Elf was particularly wobbly on his feet, completely different from how Aura had handled her landing. However, he did not seem to be hurt. He must have skillfully dissipated the force of landing with some athletic trick.

After that, he immediately began running over as quickly as he could. However, his top speed was still much slower than Aura. She must have thought so too, because she frowned and shouted:

“Hurry up!”

“Y-yes!”

The child who finally arrived in front of Ainz looked almost identical to Aura. They had to be twins, given the way they shared the same hair, the same eyes and the same features. However, if Aura was the sun, then Mare was the moon.

He looked nervous, as though he was afraid of being scolded. Momonga was surprised by the stark difference between the two. However, from what Momonga knew, Mare should not have been like this. Even if one wrote a long character description for their NPCs, it would not be reflected in their personalities.

Yet, these two Dark Elf children were displaying animated emotions in front of Momonga.

"—They must be the Aura and Mare that Bukubukuchagama-san wanted to see."

Bukubukuchagama was the guild member who had designed these two Dark Elf characters.

If only she could have been here for this...

"I, I'm sorry I kept you waiting, Momonga-sama…"

He nervously raised his eyes to peek at Momonga. He wore a vest of blue dragon scales, and a small cape that was as green as jungle leaves.

His clothes had the same basic white color as Aura, but a short section of flesh peeked out below his short skirt. It was short because the rest of his legs were covered in white silk stockings. He had an acorn-shaped pendant on a necklace like Aura, but his was made of silver.

Mare was much more lightly armed than Aura, with a pair of lustrous white gloves on his dainty little hands, and a gnarled black staff in his hands.

Mare Bello Fiore.

Like Aura, he was a Guardian of the Sixth Floor of the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick.

Momonga squinted — though his eyes were merely empty sockets — and looked at them. Aura thrust her chest forward proudly, while Mare simply cowered under Momonga's gaze.

He nodded several times, musing that the two of them were indeed the incarnation of his comrade's hard work.

"I'm glad to see that the two of you are in good spirits."

“I’m positively overflowing with energy… although it’s been a bit boring recently. It would be nice if we had an intruder or two.”

“I, I would rather not have to meet intruders… they, they’re scary…”

After hearing Mare’s words, Aura’s expression changed:

“...Haa. Momonga-sama, please excuse me for a while. Mare, come with me.”

“O-oww… Nee-chan, that hurts…”

After seeing Momonga nod slightly, Aura pinched Mare by the tip of one of his ears and dragged him away from Momonga. Then, she began whispering into Mare’s ear. Even from a distance, one could tell that she was scolding him.

“...Intruders, huh. Well, much like Mare, I don’t want to meet them either…”

At least, I’d rather meet them after having the chance to make all the preparations I need, Momonga thought as he watched the twin Guardians from afar.

After he snapped back to reality, Momonga realised that Mare was on his knees in front of Aura, who was hurling a torrent of abuse at him.

Momonga smiled, as the scene reminded him of the brother and sister who were his friends:

“Good grief, Mare was clearly not made by Peroroncino-san. Or is this because Bukubukuchagama-san believed that ‘Little brothers should listen to their big sisters’... Though come to think about it, Aura and Mare should have died once. How should I address that?”

The invasion of 1500 people had made it down to the 8th floor. Which was to say, Aura and Mare should have died then. Did they remember anything about it?

What meaning did the concept of “death” have for those two, anyway?

According to YGGDRASIL's rules, death would cost a character five levels and force him to drop one of his equipped items. In other words, characters below level 5 would immediately disappear. Players were specially exempt from this and would not vanish, but they would be reduced to the minimum of level 1. Therefore, it must be an issue with the game rules.

Using spells like [Resurrection] or [Raise Dead] would mitigate this level loss. In addition, with the use of cash items, one would only lose a bit of experience.

It was simpler for NPCs. As long as the guild paid the requisite fees to resurrect them, they would be recalled to life without any ill effects.

Therefore, players who wanted to respect their characters often favored using death to lower one's levels.

While the loss of even a single level was a harsh punishment in a game where each level required a lot of experience points, losing levels was not such a frightening prospect in YGGDRASIL. This was because the game company wanted its players to explore previously undiscovered regions and find new things, instead of hunkering down in familiar territory because they were afraid of losing levels.

With all this in mind, were the two people who perished in the wake of the 1500-man invasion the same after their resurrection?

Momonga wanted to verify this, but at the same time, he did not want to disturb them unduly. For all he knew, that large invasion might have been a traumatic experience for Aura. Momonga felt it would be unwise to question her in that manner when she had showed no overt signs of hostility. The important thing was that they were lovingly crafted NPCs of his friends in Ainz Ooal Gown.

Perhaps after clearing all the accumulated problems away, he would ask her about it.

In addition, the concept of death in-game might be different from outside it. Of course, if one died in reality, that was the end of everything, However, that might not be the case right now. He wanted to perform an experiments on

this, but first he needed to collect information and establish his priorities. Thus, putting this matter aside would be a wise decision.

After all, Momonga still had many doubts about how the YGGDRASIL he knew had changed.

Aura was still scolding Mare as Momonga stood in contemplation. Momonga pitied Mare a little. After all, he had not said anything that warranted such wrathful castigation.

In the past, when brother and sister argued, all Momonga could do was watch. But now, things were different.

“That should be enough, don’t you think?”

“Momonga-sama! But, but as a Guardian, Mare—”

“It’s fine. Aura, I understand how you feel. It is only natural that you would feel unhappy if Mare, as a Floor Guardian, said such a cowardly thing, especially if it were in my presence. However, I believe that if anyone invaded the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick, you and Mare would fearlessly step forward to engage them. There is no need for scoldings as long as one does what is required of them when the time comes.”

Momonga walked up to between the two of them and helped Mare up.

“And Mare, you should be grateful to your kind sister. Even if I were angry, I could not remain so after seeing how your sister scolded you.”

Mare looked in surprise at his sister. At this moment, Aura hurriedly said:

“Eh? No, no, it’s not like that. I wasn’t scolding him to show off in front of Momonga-sama!”

“Aura, it’s fine. It doesn’t matter what you had in mind. I understand your kind intentions. However, I must tell you that I am not dissatisfied with Mare’s performance as a Guardian.”

“Um, ah, yes, yes! Thank you, Momonga-sama!”

“Th-thank you very much…”

Momonga felt uncomfortable as he watched the two of them bow to him. He felt particularly ill at ease as he saw them look at him with their shining eyes. In order to camouflage the embarrassment he felt at being looked at that way, Momonga coughed.

“Hm, that’s right. Aura, I think you said something about being bored because there were no intruders?”

“—Ah, no, that, about that…”

After seeing Aura’s fearful reaction, Momonga felt bad about asking his question.

“I do not intend to reproach you for your answer, so feel free to speak your mind.”

“...Yes, a little. There’s nobody around here who can spar with me for more than five minutes.”

Aura touched her index fingers together before looking up hopefully to Momonga.

As a Guardian, Aura was level 100. There were precious few opponents in this dungeon which could rival her. There were nine such NPCs, including Aura and Mare, as well as one other.

“What if Mare was your opponent?”

Mare’s body trembled as he shrank away. He shook his head with moist eyes, and he looked very afraid. Aura sighed as she saw the way he looked.

As Aura sighed, a sweet scent filled the surrounding air. Unlike the fragrance Albedo radiated, this scent seemed somewhat persistent. As he remembered Aura’s ability, Momonga took a step away from the scent.

“Ah, sorry, Momonga-sama!”

As Aura noticed Momonga's strange reaction, she hurriedly dispersed the scent with her hand.

Among Aura's skills as a Beast Tamer, there were certain passive skills that had buffing and debuffing effects. These abilities acted through her breath and had a radius of several meters, some even up to ten meters. With the effect of certain skills, that radius could be enlarged to unbelievable proportions.

In YGGDRASIL, icons representing buffs and debuffs appeared in one's field of vision, so one could see if they were under the effect of an ability. However, no indication of these changes appeared before him, which made things quite troublesome.

"Ah, it should be fine now, I cancelled it!"

"Is that so…"

"...Although you're undead, so mind-affecting effects shouldn't work on you, right, Momonga-sama?"

That was true in YGGDRASIL. The undead were immune to mind-affecting effects, whether positive or negative.

"...Was I within the effective radius?"

"Mm."

Aura lowered her head in fear, and so did Mare beside her.

"...I'm not angry, Aura," Momonga said in as gentle a voice as he could manage. "Aura… You don't have to be so afraid. Do you think such a simple skill would inconvenience me? I was simply asking if I was within the effective range of your skill."

"Yes! Just now, you were within range of my skill."

After hearing Aura's energetic answer as relief flooded back into her, Momonga realized that his very presence filled Aura with fear.

Once he noticed this, he felt a clenching pain in his nonexistent stomach. What if he became weaker from this? Every time he thought about that, he tried desperately to put it out of mind.

“And what was its effect?”

“Ah, the effect just now… should have been fear.”

“Umu...”

He did not feel afraid. In YGGDRASIL, one would not be affected by attacks from the guild or party to which one belonged. Although, there was a very real chance this rule no longer applies, so it would be best to verify that now.

“Aura, I was just thinking that your skill should not have an effect on people from the same guild… the same group.”

“Eh?”

Aura’s eyes went wide, much like Mare’s did from the side. Judging from their reactions, Momonga realised that they did not agree with him.

“Am I mistaken?”

“Yes… Could it be you mixed it up with the ability to freely change the range of one’s skills?”

So it seemed the rule disabling friendly fire was no longer in effect. Mare was not affected while being near Aura, but that might be because he had equipped an item which negated mind-affecting effects on himself.

In contrast, the undead Momonga’s divine-class items did not have any data which protected against mind-affecting effects. But in that case, why did Momonga not feel fear?

There were two possibilities.

He might have resisted it with his base stats, or resisted it with his immunities from being an undead creature.

Because he was not sure which hypothesis was correct, Momonga decided to conduct an experiment:

“Can you try using other effects?”

Aura tilted her head and made a strange noise of bafflement. Momonga was reminded of a puppy, and he reached out to stroke Aura’s head.

Her hair and scalp felt smooth as silk, and caressing her was very comfortable. Because Aura did not seem to mind, Momonga wanted to keep going on. However, Mare looked a little frightened as he stared at them from the side, so he paused.

What was Mare thinking, anyway?

After thinking for a short while, Momonga released his staff and ruffled Mare’s hair with his other hand.

The quality of Mare’s hair felt better, but Momonga hardly paid it any heed as he rubbed their heads until he was satisfied. Then, he remembered what he was here to do:

“Then I have something to ask of you. I plan to conduct certain experiments… I’ll need your help for them.”

At first, the two of them did not know how to respond to that. However, when Momonga’s hand left their heads, the two of them had embarrassed yet happy looks on their faces.

Aura cheerfully replied, “Yes, I understand! Momonga-sama, leave it to me!”

Momonga reached out a hand to quell Aura.

“Before that—”

Momonga gripped the floating staff in his hand.

Just like before, when he used the power of the ring, he focused on the staff. Among the many powers it possessed, Momonga concentrated on one of the gems which decorated the staff.

It was a divine-class item called the Gem of the Moon, and the ability Momonga chose—

—Called forth Moonlight Wolves.

As the summoning magic took effect, three beasts appeared out of thin air.

The special effects of the summoning were the same as in YGGDRASIL, so Momonga was not surprised by them.

Moonlight Wolves looked very similar to Siberian Wolves, but they radiated a silver glow. Momonga could feel a mysterious connection between himself and the Moonlight Wolves. It clearly showed who was the master and the servant between them.

“Are those Moonlight Wolves?”

Aura’s tone showed she did not understand. After all, she had no idea why Momonga would summon such weak monsters.

Moonlight Wolves were highly agile and they were useful for ambushes, but they were only level 20 or so. They were very weak monsters compared to Aura and Momonga. However, monsters of this level were enough for their purposes this time round.

In fact, the weaker they were, the better.

“Yes, they are. Now, include me in the radius of your skill.”

“Eh? Really?’

“It’s fine.”

Momonga's insistence was so great that even the dubious Aura went ahead with it.

Given that they were no longer in the game, there was a possibility he could not ignore, which was that Aura's skill might not have activated properly. In order to rule that out, he had to expose himself to the skill with a third party, which was why he had summoned the Moonlight Wolves.

After that, Aura exhaled several times, but Momonga did not feel affected in any way. He tried relaxing or turning around in the middle of the skill, but he felt nothing strange. However, the Moonlight Wolf behind him was affected. Thus, he concluded that Aura's skill had taken effect.

From this experiment, Momonga learned that mind-affecting effects did not work on him. This meant—

In the game, demihuman and heteromorphic races unlocked racial skills when they reached certain levels. An Overlord like Momonga had the following skills:

Create High-Tier Undead 4 times/day, Create Mid-Tier Undead 12 times/day, Create Low-Tier Undead 20 times/day, Negative Energy Touch, Despair Aura V (instant death), Negative Protection, Dark Soul, Black Halo, Undead Blessing, Unholy Protection, Wisdom of Darkness, Speak Evil Tongues, Ability Damage IV, Piercing Damage Resistance V, Slashing Damage Resistance V, Turn Resistance III, High-Tier Physical Immunity III, High-Tier Magic Immunity III, Cold, Acid and Electrical Immunity, as well as Arcane Vision/See Invisibility.

And then there were the abilities from his class levels — Instant Death Magic Enhancement, Rite of Darkness, Undead Aura, undead creation, undead control, undead strengthening, and so on.

Then there were the basic special qualities which all undead possessed:

Immunity to critical hits, mind-affecting, poison, disease, sleep, paralysis, death and energy drain effects. Resistance to necromancy and biological penalties. Undead did not need to breathe, eat or drink. They were healed by negative energy and had darkvision.

Of course, they had weaknesses too, like Good, Light and Holy Vulnerability IV, Bludgeoning Vulnerability V, Vulnerability to Holy/Good Consecrated Areas II, double damage from fire and so on.

—This meant that Momonga could be sure that he still possessed the basic abilities of an undead being and his special skills gained through levelling up.

“I see. Well, this was an informative experiment… Thank you, Aura. Are you alright?”

“Yes, I’m fine.”

“Is that so… Return.”

The three Moonlight Wolves vanished as though time itself had turned backward for them.

“...Momonga-sama, did you come to our floor in order to perform the experiments just now?”

Mare was nodding beside her.

“Eh? Ah, no. In truth, I came here for training.”

“Training? Eh? For you, Momonga-sama?”

Aura and Mare’s eyes were so wide it seemed like they might fall out of their sockets. Their surprise was only natural; after all, who would expect to hear such a thing from Momonga, a powerful magic caster, the supreme ruler of the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick, as well as the one who stood above all?

Momonga, who had anticipated this reaction, swiftly replied:

“Indeed.”

After seeing Momonga’s swift reply and hearing the light impact of his staff on the ground, realization dawned on Aura’s face. Momonga was quite pleased with himself, as this reaction had fallen within his scope of prediction.

“Is, is that the legendary weapon of the highest order which only you may wield, Momonga-sama?”

Legendary weapon? What did he mean by that?

Momonga had his doubts, but after seeing Mare’s shining eyes, he knew the question was not asked with ill intent.

“Indeed, this is the Staff of Ainz Ooal Gown, which I made with my guild members.”

Momonga raised the Staff, and it immediately radiated a beautiful glow which lit up its surroundings. The glow was as blinding as the Staff itself. However, the surroundings were filled with inauspicious, flickering shadows, which emitted an aura of menace.

Momonga’s voice was more animated and proud when he spoke:

“The seven gems in the Staff’s snake mouths are all divine-class artifacts. Since they all belong to a set, having them together unlocks even greater power beyond their base abilities. Gathering them all required an incalculable amount of time and effort, and many of our members stated they wanted to quit during the process. I can’t remember how many monsters we farmed for their drops… Anyway, in addition, the Staff’s power is beyond that of a divine-class item. In fact, it almost approaches that of a World-Class Item. Its most potent feature is its automatic engagement system… cough, cough.”

...It would seem he had gotten carried away.

He had built it with his comrades in the past, but because he had never taken it out before, there had been no chance for it to shine. Now that he had the chance to show it off, his praise surged forth like a rising tide. Momonga forcibly quelled his desire to flaunt the Staff.

How embarrassing...

“Mm, something like that.”

“That, that’s amazing…”

“That’s totally awesome, Momonga-sama!”

Momonga almost laughed as he saw their eyes. He tried his best to suppress the delighted expression on his face — although skeletons had no expressions — and continued:

“Which was why I wanted to run some experiments with this Staff. I hope you can help me.”

“Yes! Understood! We’ll go prepare right away! Then… could we see the power of the Staff?”

“Mm, that’s fine. Then, I shall show you a fraction of the power of this mighty Staff, which only I can wield.”

“Awesome~” Aura exclaimed as she jumped up and down adorably.

Mare was hard-pressed to hide his delight, as could be seen from the twitching tips of his ears.

Ah, this is bad, I can’t let my stern facade slip because of this. Momonga tried to regain his dignity as he reminded himself thusly.

“...And there is one more thing, Aura. I have already ordered the other Guardians here. They will arrive within the hour.”

“Eh? Then, then we need to get ready for—”

“No, there is no need. All you need to do is stay here and wait for them.”

“Is that so? Hm… all the Guardians — that means Shalltear’s coming too?”

“*All* the Guardians.”

“...Haa.”

Aura’s long ears suddenly drooped.

However, Mare's reaction was not as exaggerated as Aura's. According to her backstory, Aura was designed to have a poor relationship with Shalltear, but that was probably not the case for Mare.

What would happen next? Momonga sighed quietly.

Part 2

The company of 50 men galloped across the grassy plains on their horses.

Every man in the company was athletically built. One of them was particularly eye-catching.

There was no better word to describe him than “fit”. His muscles were evident even through his breastplate.

He was around 30 years old, and his face was tanned from long days of sun and covered in wrinkles. His black hair was neat and trimmed, and his dark eyes had a sharp look about them.
The man riding by his side said:

“Warrior-Captain, we’re almost at the first village on our patrol route.”

“Ah, yes, Vice-Captain.”

Gazef Stronoff, the renowned Warrior-Captain of the Re-Estize Kingdom, did not see any villages.

He calmed his racing heart and maintained his mount’s speed. Although he had kept the horse’s pace at one which should not be overly fatiguing, they had hustled all the way here from the Royal Capital, and fatigue was beginning to accumulate within Gazef’s body. It must have been at least as bad for his horse, which was why he tried not to overburden it.

“I hope they’re alright,” the Vice-Captain said. There was a current of unease running beneath these words, and Gazef felt the same way.

The King had ordered Gazef and his men: “Imperial knights have been spotted at the border. If these reports are true, eliminate them immediately.”

The city of E-Rantel was closer, and under normal circumstances, it would be faster to send troops from there. However, the Imperial knights were powerful and well-equipped, and there was an insurmountable gap between them and average conscripts. The only people in the Kingdom which could

match up to the Imperial knights were Gazef and his troops. However, handing the entire task to Gazef and his men alone was the height of foolishness.

Before Gazef reached their objective, other troops could have been mobilized, in order to protect the villages. Though they could not win, they could at least fight a holding action. There were many ways to use extra men. However, this had not been done — no, it could not be done.

Gazef, who knew the reason why, was filled with agitation. He tightly gripped the reins and tried not to tug on them. Even so, it was difficult to suppress the thoughts burning in his heart.

"Warrior-Captain, just having us do the searching is pointless. Couldn't we bring everyone from the warrior band and have them help us? We could also hire adventurers from E-Rantel to help us out. Why are you doing this?"

"...Enough, Vice-Captain. Things might go poorly if someone heard that Imperial knights were running loose in the Kingdom's territory."

"Warrior-Captain, there's nobody here. You don't have to stand on ceremony, but I hope you can tell me the truth," the Vice-Captain said with a smile. Then, he continued, "Was it those nobles?"

Gazef did not reply to those disdainful words, because that was the case.

"Those damned nobles, treating human lives like pieces in their power struggles! And on top of that, since this is the King's domain, they can use any problems here to take shots at the King."

"...Not all nobles think that way."

"And maybe you're right, Warrior-Captain, and there are some nobles who think of the people. For example, the Golden Princess. But apart from her, there's practically no one else… If only the Kingdom was ruled by a dictator, couldn't we ignore those damn nobles and work for the good of the people?"

"If you interfere too strongly, it might lead to a civil war that would tear the Kingdom apart. Given that we're facing the threat of the Empire's expanding ambitions, a war like that would be a disaster for the common folk."

“I know that, but…”

“Just leave this matter aside for…”

Gazef’s voice cut off halfway, as his eyes looked intently forward.

Thick, black smoke rose up from behind the small hill ahead of them, and it was not just one or two plumes.

Everyone present knew what that meant.

Gazef couldn’t help but click his tongue, and he squeezed his legs around his horse’s flanks.

The scene which the rapidly galloping Gazef and company saw did not deviate from their expectations. Before them spread an expanse of blackened ground, the scorched remains of a village. The corpses of several of the burned houses remained standing, like tombstones.

Gazef gave an order in with a voice of steel: “Everyone, we’re moving. Quickly now!”

♦ ♦ ♦

The village had been put to the torch, and only the burned skeletons of the destroyed homes gave any clue as to what it had been like before.

The smell of blood blended with the stench of burning as one walked between them.

Gazef’s face was calm, with no hint of any emotions on it. However, no expression could convey his feelings more clearly than this. The same applied to Vice-Captain who walked by Gazef’s side.

Over a hundred villagers had lived here. Six had survived. Everyone else had been mercilessly slain, whether they were women, children, or infants.

“Vice-Captain, have some of our people return the survivors to E-Rantel.”

“But wait, this is…”

“You’re right, it’s a big risk. Even so, we can’t just abandon them like this.”

E-Rantel was directly administered by the King, and protecting its surrounding villages was the King’s duty. Abandoning the survivors here would cause a lot of problems for him. One could imagine how the Noble Faction, which opposed the King, would seize on that opportunity to make trouble for him. More importantly—

“Please reconsider. A lot of the survivors witnessed Imperial knights. We can consider that as having fulfilled the first part of the King’s orders. I feel we should fall back for now and make sufficient preparations in E-Rantel before carrying out the next part.”

“No.”

“Warrior-Captain! You should know by now that this is a trap. The timing of the attack came too close to our arrival at E-Rantel to be anything but a coincidence. Their ruthless actions were only committed after we arrived, and the reason why they did not kill everyone was in order to use them as bait for a trap.”

The survivors had not evaded the knights. Rather, the enemy had not finished them off. It might be a plot to divide Gazef’s strength by having him split off his men to protect the survivors.

“Warrior-Captain, do you intend to keep at it, knowing well that there’s a trap?”

“...Indeed.”

“Warrior Captain, are you serious about that?! Indeed, you are strong, and you could easily defeat a hundred knights. However, the Empire has that old man. Even you would be in great danger against him. There’s also a chance that you might lose against the Empire’s renowned Four Knights, under-equipped as you are. Therefore, I beg you to fall back. To the King, losing a few villages is nothing compared to losing you!”

Gazef could only listen quietly as his Vice-Captain got more and more nervous.

“If we won’t fall back… then we should leave the survivors behind and launch a pursuit with all of us.”

“That would be the wisest option.... But at the same time, it would mean that we would be leaving them to their deaths. Do you think they can survive by themselves?”

The Vice-Captain could not reply, because he knew the survivors’ chances by themselves were practically nonexistent.

Without someone to protect and escort them to a safe area, they would be dead in days.

Even so, the Vice-Captain spoke — no, he had to speak.

“...Warrior-Captain. Yours is the most valuable life here. The villagers’ lives are nothing in comparison.”

Gazef was well aware of the painful decision the Vice-Captain had made, and he was angry at himself for having forced him to say such a thing.

Even so, he could not comply with the Vice-Captain’s request.

“I was born a commoner, and so were you.”

“Indeed, and I enlisted in admiration of you, Warrior-Captain.”

“I recall you were born in a village as well?”

“Yes, which is why…”

“Life in a village is difficult, and death is a constant companion. It’s not uncommon for a village to be attacked by a monster and many lives lost as a result, am I wrong?”

“...No, you are not.”

“When a monster shows up, the rank and file soldiers are hard-pressed to deal with it. If a village does not have the money to hire adventurers to deal with monsters, all they can do is hunker down and wait for the monster to leave.”

“...That’s right.”

“Then, can you say you did not look forward to something like this? Can you say you did not hope for the nobles or someone strong to come and save you?”

“...It would be a lie to say that I didn’t. But the fact is that nobody ever came forward to help. At least, the lord of the land where my village was didn’t pay for adventurers to help us.”

“Since that is the case… why don’t we prove that we’re not like him? Come, let us save these people.”

The Vice-Captain thought of his own experiences, and could not say anything in response.

“Vice-Captain, let’s show the villagers what heroes who willingly plunge into danger to save others look like. Let’s show them how the strong will save the weak.”

Gazef’s eyes met the Vice-Captain’s, and countless emotions passed in between them.

His voice somewhat tired but grateful, the Vice-Captain replied:

“...Then allow me to lead the men. There are many who can replace me, but none who can take the place of the Warrior-Captain.”

“Don’t be foolish. My chances of survival are higher. Remember, we’re not going to die, but to save the people of the Kingdom.”

The Vice-Captain opened his mouth several times, as though to speak, but in the end, he chose to remain silent.

“Then, pick the soldiers who will escort the villagers to E-Rantel with you.”

♦ ♦ ♦

The crimson light of the setting sun shone on a group of men upon the plains.

There were 45 of them.

They must have had excellent camouflage techniques given the way they had suddenly appeared out of nowhere. Magic was most likely involved.

It was obvious at a glance that they were not simple mercenaries, travellers or adventurers.

They were all dressed the same way, in armor made of special metals, which emphasised defensive power and mobility. After enchantment, they were more protective than full plate armor.

The bags on their backs were small, hardly the kind one would expect a traveller to carry. Those bags were enchanted as well. Their belts were special, designed to carry potions, and the capes on their backs also radiated an aura of magic.

Gathering this many sets of magic items would be a daunting task, be it in terms of time, money or effort required. The fact that these people were outfitted in this sort of equipment was a clear sign that they had the backing of a nation, or the equivalent.

However, there were no markings or badges on them which might reveal their allegiance. In other words, they were hiding the fact that they were black ops unit.

They looked at the ruins of the village with emotionless eyes. Although the stink of blood and fire hung heavy in the air, their merciless gazes seemed to say that this was only to be expected.

"...They fled."

The words were spoken with a hint of disappointment.

"...Well, that's only to be expected. We will continue attacking villages as bait. The beast must be lured into the trap."

The man who spoke cast a razor-sharp look in the direction where Gazef's company was riding.

"Show me the village which we will next be using as bait."

Part 3

Momonga pointed his finger, preparing to cast a spell on the strawman in the corner of the arena.

Momonga did not know many pure damage spells. Instead, he focused on instant-death spells with additional effects. As a result, he was less effective against non-living entities. He should have selected a simple damaging spell against a target like the one before him, but Momonga's levels were largely in necromancy-type classes, which strengthened his necromantic spells. However, the effectiveness of these spells was several notches below a character whose class levels enhanced combat spells.

He glanced curiously at the children to the side, whose eyes were glittering in anticipation. He felt uneasy as he wondered whether he could live up to their expectations.

Then, Momonga peeked at the two huge monsters.

Their massive bodies were three meters tall, and resembled inverted triangles.

Their skeletal structure was a mix of humans and dragons, covered in corded, sinewy muscles, which were in turn sheathed in a layer of scales that were harder than steel.

Their faces resembled those of dragons, while their tails were as thick as tree trucks. They were wingless and bipedal, like a dragon standing on its hind legs. Their arms were wider around than a man's torso, and each was about

half the length of its body. They bore weapons that resembled both a shield and a sword.

These monsters were called Dragonkin, and under the control of Aura's beast tamer skills, they rearranged the Colosseum to her liking.

Although they were level 55 monsters with no special abilities of note, their powerful arms and prodigious stamina were a match for higher-levelled monsters.

Momonga sighed softly, and then looked back at the strawmen.

It was quite troubling to have people look at him with expectation in their eyes. His objective this time was to verify that he could use magic.

The reason for allowing Aura and Mare to witness this experiment was to impress his power upon them before the other Guardians arrived. In this way, they would learn that opposing Momonga was a foolish course of action.

The two kids did not seem like they would betray him, nor did he feel that they would betray him. However, if he lost the ability to use his magic, Momonga was not confident that they would stay loyal to him.

Aura treated Momonga like an old friend, but to Momonga, it was the first time they had met. He could tell that the twins were the lovingly crafted embodiment of his guild members' hard work.

However, there was no guarantee that their design and programming was perfect. In the face of countless situations and stimuli, a gap or weakness might appear somewhere.

They were intelligent beings who could think on their own, so flaws in their reasoning must exist somewhere. If they were not programmed to be loyal to weaklings, what would that mean for him? In all likelihood, they were not written to be slavishly loyal. That would mean that whether or not they obeyed the order would depend on who the giver was. And it would be bad enough if they did not listen to him, but what if they betrayed their guild leader after finding out that he was powerless...?

It was not good to have too many doubts, but blind trust was not a wise move either.

He would cross that bridge when he came to it. Momonga turned his mind to the present.

Another reason for coming here was that if he found that he could not use magic, he could discuss the situation with Aura and Mare.

The twins thought he had come to test the power of the Staff, so now that its power had been proven, he could cover up any ineffectiveness of his own magic.

It was a pretty good plan.

Momonga could not help but congratulate himself. Had he ever been so cool and calculating in the past? However, there was nobody here who could answer Momonga's question.

He cast aside the doubts in his mind, and focused on using the magic of YGGDRASIL.

There were over 6000 spells in the game, from Tier 1 to Tier 10, as well as Super-Tier magic. These spells were divided among various types and schools, and Momonga could use 718 of them. A normal level 100 player would only be able to use 300 of them, so Momonga was an exceptional case.

Momonga had memorized almost all of these spells, and he considered which one to use now.

To begin with, because the restriction on friendly fire had been lifted, he needed to know how the effective radius of a spell would show itself.

Therefore, he decided against a single-target spell, but picked an area-effect spell. Next, considering his target was a strawman, he should—

In YGGDRASIL, he could cast a spell by tapping its respective icon. However, there were no icons for him to touch. Therefore, there had to be some other way.

He was not sure, but he had a faint idea of how to use his magic.

It was a power hidden within him. Just like how he had deactivated his negative touch, Momonga focused within himself. An icon appeared, as though floating in mid-air—

And Ainz smiled in delight.

He was fully aware of information like the spell's effective radius, its recast delay, and so on. Knowing this information, being sure of his power filled him with a surging excitement and warm satisfaction. Unlike in YGGDRASIL, he felt that the magic was part of him. This was a satisfaction he could never have experienced in YGGDRASIL.

He channelled the jubilation in his heart — although his mood calmed quickly, he could still feel joy and excitement — into his fingertip, and spoke the words:

" [Fireball]."

An expanding globe of flame shot out from the finger pointing at the strawman.

The fireball struck the strawman unerringly, as he had predicted. It burst, releasing a wave of scorching flame that blew the strawman away. The inner part of the fireball exploded, turning the strawman and the surrounding area into a sea of fire.

All this happened in an instant. Then, besides the blackened strawman, there was nothing left.

"Fufufufu…"

Aura and Mare watched Momonga snicker, clueless as to what was going on.

"—Aura, set up another strawman."
"Ah, yes, at once! Hurry up and do it!"

One of the Dragonkin picked up another strawman, and placed it beside the burned one.

Momonga paced around the strawman, before casting a spell on it:

“[Napalm].”

A column of flame appeared beside the strawman, engulfing it in fire. Momonga paused a beat, then cast another spell on the remnants of the strawman:

“ [Fireball].”

The fireball struck the remains of the strawman, scattering its ashes in a puff of smoke.

The recast time between spells was the same as in YGGDRASIL. The actual process of casting was faster than in YGGDRASIL. Previously, in order to cast an area-effect spell, he would need to choose the spell, then move the area-effect cursor over the desired area. The process now was quicker than that.

“Perfect,” Momonga said, his voice filled with the same satisfaction he felt in his heart.

“Momonga-sama, should I prepare more strawmen?”

Aura still did not understand. She was already aware that Momonga was a mighty magic caster, so she did not feel the show before her was anything special.

However, that was the impression Momonga wanted to give them, and from the look on the twins’ faces, it would seem he had succeeded.

“...No, there is no need. I wish to try something else.”

After rejecting Aura’s suggestion, Momonga began his next experiment.

“ [Message].”

The first party he tried to contact was a GM. In YGGDRASIL, when one used the [Message] spell, as long as the other party was within the game, one would hear a call tone. Otherwise, there would be no sound, and the spell would immediately terminate.

What happened now was somewhere between both of those. It felt like something was constantly reaching out, as though looking for something to connect to. This was the first time Momonga had experienced something like this and it was difficult to describe.

This feeling continued for a while, and in the end, after failing to connect, the [Message] spell ended.

A profound sense of disappointment flooded through him.

Momonga tried casting the same spell again. This time, he did not choose a GM.

This time, he picked one of his comrades from the past — a member of Ainz Ooal Gown.

He cast the spell, though his heart was filled with one part of hope and ninety-nine parts of resignation. As expected, there was no response. He tried to contact the 40, no, 41 members of the Guild with a [Message], but after receiving no reply, Momonga gently shook his head.

In truth, he had expected this outcome and had resigned himself to it, but actually being confronted by that fact filled him with an incomparable feeling of despair.

In the end, Momonga decided to contact Sebas.

—It connected.

This proved that the [Message] spell was working, and that most likely, it could only contact people within this new world.

“Momonga-sama.”

A voice of deepest respect echoed through his mind. Momonga considered that Sebas might be bowing to him on the other side of the [Message], like in real-life companies.

Just then, Sebas spoke again, as Momonga fell silent from thinking about these ridiculous things.

"...May I ask if something is wrong?"

"Ah, ahhh, forgive me. I spaced out there. That's right, how are the surroundings like?"

"Yes. We are surrounded by plains, with no intelligent creatures in sight."

"A plain… not a swamp?"

The Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick should have been bordered by a swamp that was inhabited by frog-like demihumans called Tuvegs. The swamp was shrouded in mist, and it was poisonous.

"Yes. There are only plains around us."

Momonga could not help but smile.

All this was too much...

"In other words, the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick has been wholly transported to a different place? …Sebas, is there anything floating in the sky, or did anything like a message appear?"

"No, there is nothing like that. The heavens are as boundless as the 6th Floor's night sky."

"What! Did you say night sky?... Is there anything suspicious around you?"

"No… I have not seen anything unusual. Besides the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick, there are no other man-made structures in sight."

"Is that so… is that so…"

What should he say? All Momonga could do was grab his head and try to think. But in his heart, he knew that this was most likely the case.

Sebas' silence was a subtle hint that he was awaiting orders. Momonga glanced at the strap on his left wrist. In another 20 minutes, the other Guardians would arrive. If that was the case, there was only one order he could give.

"Return in 20 minutes. When you come back to Nazarick, head to the Colosseum. All the Guardians will be coming, so when you arrive, I hope you will tell them about what you saw.

"Understood."

"Then, gather as much information as you can before you return."

After hearing Sebas' acknowledgement, Momonga terminated the 'Message' spell.

Just as Momonga was about to sigh in relief that everything was over, he remembered the expectant looks on the twins' faces.

He had already told them he was going to verify the Staff's power, so he had to let them see it. Momonga grasped the Staff, and pondered which fraction of its might he should reveal.

The numberless powers within the Staff of Ainz Ooal Gown seemed to be begging Momonga to unleash them.

Right now, he needed a flashy spell.

" [Summon Primal Fire Elemental]."

In accordance with Momonga's will, the Orb of Fire grasped within one of the Staff's snake mouths pulsed with puissance. Momonga could feel the movement of a mighty, invisible power and thrust the Staff of Ainz Ooal Gown forth. A vast ball of light bloomed from the tip of the Staff, and a vortex of roaring flame spilled forth from that globe of radiance.

The fires spun faster and faster, until the tornado of flame reached a width of four meters and a height of six meters.

The crimson inferno threw off gusts of scorching air in all directions.

From the corner of his eye, he could see the Dragonkin protecting Aura and Mare with their vast bodies. The searing winds made his cape flap violently. So intense was the heat that it would not have been unusual for a normal person to be burned by them, but Momonga had acquired a complete immunity to fire damage in order to negate one of the weaknesses of the undead, so it had no effect on him at all.

Soon, the vast cyclone of fire, swallowing the surrounding air as it burned hot enough to melt metal, began to flicker and shudder as it took a humanoid form.

Primal Fire Elementals could be said to be among the highest-ranking among all elemental monsters. They were over level 85. Just like he had with the Moonlight Wolves, Momonga felt a mysterious connection to the Primal Fire Elemental.

“Uwah...”

Aura was watching it intently as she made noises of surprise.

As she looked upon the top-tier elemental, something that even her summoning powers would not be able to bring forth, Aura’s face bore a look of excited admiration, like a child who had just received a dearly beloved present.

“...Do you want to fight it?”

“Eh?”

“Ehhhhh?”

After a moment of hesitation, Aura grinned innocently. Compared to a normal child's smile, hers was a little — no, the truth was that it was quite scary. In contrast, Mare's smile from the side seemed more like that of a child.

"Can I?"

"Don't worry. It'll be fine even if you defeat it."

Momonga shrugged to indicate that it was alright. The Staff could summon one Primal Fire Elemental a day. In other words, the Staff could summon another such being after one day had passed. As such, defeating it would not be a great loss.

"Ah, I suddenly remembered that I had something urgent to do…"

"Mare."

A hand reached out and firmly grasped Mare's arm, not allowing him to escape. His sister had no intention of fleeing. Aura's smile stopped Mare in his tracks. Perhaps to Momonga it might have been a cute girl's smile, but to the other person present, who looked almost the same as Aura, it was anything but cute, and Mare's face froze solid as he looked on it.

She dragged Mare in front of the Primal Fire Elemental. Mare's eyes looked around, and he looked desperately to Momonga for help.

In response to his hopeful smile that blossomed delicately on his face, Momonga simply clapped.

The flower of hope promptly wilted.

"Alright, try your best, you two. Don't blame me if you get hurt."

"Kay~"

Aura responded energetically, in contrast with Mare's nearly inaudible and despondent reply. Momonga felt that as long as Mare was around, neither of them would get hurt. Thus, by the power of the connection between himself

and his summoned creature, he ordered the Primal Fire Elemental to attack the twins.

As the conflagration that was the Primal Fire Elemental approached them, the twins met its attack with Aura as the frontliner while Mare was the rear guard.

Aura slashed at the Primal Fire Elemental, holding her whip in both her hands, while Mare used magic to deal damage.

“Well, it seems it’ll be an easy fight.”

Momonga’s eyes left the one-sided battle which was taking place and began to ponder the other things he needed to investigate.

He had already finished verifying that he could use and activate his spells and equipped magic items. Thus, the next things he had to check on were his other items. Scrolls, wands and rods were particularly important. All of them were magic items that could produce a spell-like effect. Scrolls were one-use expendables, while rods and wands had charges, which they consumed to produce Their effects.

Momonga possessed many magic items. He was a hoarder by nature and did not like using expendable items because he felt it was a waste, to the point where he did not even feel like using high-end recovery items when he encountered a boss. This went beyond mere prudence to miserliness, which was why his stock of items was so great.

In YGGDRASIL, all of these were stored in his personal inventory. Then, in this world, where had his inventory and all its contents gone?

Momonga recalled how he had opened his inventory in the past, and reached his hand into the air as though searching for something. It felt as though he was reaching his hand past the surface of a lake, and an observer would think that Momonga’s hand and part of his arm had vanished into nothingness.

Then, like he was opening a window, Momonga swept his hand to one side. A hole appeared out of nowhere, and within it were many beautifully-crafted magic staves. It was exactly like the inventory in YGGDRASIL.

He moved his hand in a scrolling motion. In the space revealed, one could see all manner of scrolls, wands, weapons, armor, cosmetic items, gems, potions, other consumables… the sheer number of magic items in there was awe-inspiring.

The relieved Momonga could not help but laugh.

If this were the case, Momonga felt that he could guarantee his own safety even if everyone in the Tomb set themselves against him,.

As he absently watched Aura and Mare's intense battle, Momonga considered the things he had learned so far.

Were the NPCs he met programs?

No, their sapience was such that they were indistinguishable from human beings. Programs could not show such complex emotions. He could assume that for some mysterious reason, they had ended up like human beings.

And what was this world?

He had no idea. Since he could use YGGDRASIL's magic here, it made sense to think of this place as being in YGGDRASIL, but after observing various discrepancies, it did not seem like he was in a game. Was he in a game, or a new world? The answer was probably one of those.

How should I deal with future events?

Momonga had already verified that he could use his abilities from YGGDRASIL. That being the case, if the data for the monsters and NPCs of the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick had carried over as well, he could be reasonably sure that they were not his enemies.

The thing was, if they were not data programs, but some other kind of being, then he would have to treat them differently. For the time being, it would be best to display the attitude of a superior being and put on an act of stern majesty — provided he could pull it off.

In what direction should I proceed in the future?

He should search hard for clues. Although he was not sure what was going on with this world, for the time being, Momonga was simply a clueless wayfarer. He had to take small steps and carefully gather information.

If this is another world, should I try to return to the real world?

There were doubts in his heart. If he had friends in the real world, then he should go back to it. If his parents were still alive, he would desperately find a way back to them. If he had family members to care for, or a girlfriend...

But he did not have anyone like that.

His life was an endless cycle of going to the office to work and returning home to log onto YGGDRASIL, where he would prepare for his comrades to come back. But now, none of that waited for him. Then, was there any point at all in going back?

But if he could go back, then he should think of a way to get back. It was better to have more options, because the world outside might be a hellish one.

“What should I do…”

Momonga’s quiet mumbling carried softly through the air.

Part 4

The gigantic Primal Fire Elemental vanished slowly, as though melting away into the air. The blazing heat that it left in its wake began to cool off. As the Fire Elemental disappeared, Momonga could feel the link he had to it fading away, like smoke on the wind.

The Primal Fire Elemental possessed extraordinary attack power and stamina, but to Aura, who could ignore the damage of its area-effect flames and could nimbly evade its blows, it was little more than a giant target.

Although Aura would still lose HP if she were attacked, Mare the druid would not permit that to occur. In fact, he had cast all sorts of buffs and debuffs to great effect during the battle.

The two of them played their roles as frontliner and rear guard perfectly, with flawless teamwork. At the same time, Momonga could feel the reality of this battle, completely unlike those he had fought in the game.

“Spectacular… The two of you put on a good show.”

The twins smiled happily as they heard Momonga’s sincere praise.

“Thank you, Momonga-sama! It’s been some time since we had to work so hard!”

The two of them tried to wipe off their sweat, but right after they did, more of it beaded on their skin, rolling down their dark skin.

Momonga silently opened his inventory, and withdrew a magic item — a Pitcher of Endless Water.

In YGGDRASIL, there were statuses like hunger and thirst, but neither of those applied to the undead Momonga, so he had no use for items like those. At most, he used them on his mounts.

The glass pitcher was filled with water. Droplets of condensation immediately formed on the surface of the glass; probably because the water inside was very cold.

Momonga then took out a pair of beautiful glasses, filled them with water from the Pitcher, and gave them to the twins.

“Aura, Mare, have a drink.”

“Eh? But that’s not good, right, Momonga-sama…”

“Y-yes, I can make water with my magic too…”

Momonga smiled bitterly as he saw Aura waving her hand and Mare shaking his head.

“Think nothing of it. The two of you have always done well. Think of this as my thanks to you.”

“Fuwa~”

“Fuee~”

Aura and Mare’s ears turned red, and they shyly, nervously reached out to take the glasses.

“Th-thank you, Momonga-sama!”

“To, to think you would pour water for us, Momonga-sama!”

Was this so delightful?

Aura, who had ceased her protests, took the glass in both hands and downed it in one gulp. Droplets of water escaped the corner of her mouth, down the smooth curves of her pulsing throat and into the jerkin covering her chest. Mare held his cup with both hands and slowly sipped from it. The differences between them were obvious even in the way they drank water.

Momonga touched his throat as he saw the two of them. It felt like there was a thin layer of skin around his neck bones.

To date, this body of his had not felt thirst, so it did not bother him. Although he was well aware that the dead would not feel this way, he could not help but think this was all a joke once he realized that he was no longer human.

Momonga continued touching himself. He had no skin, muscles, blood vessels, nerves or internal organs. His body was nothing but bones. He vaguely understood it in his heart, but it felt so unreal that he could not help exploring his body with his fingers.

His sense of touch seemed duller from when he was a human being, as though there was a thin layer of cloth between his fingers and whatever he was touching. In contrast, his vision, hearing and other senses were sharper than before.

One might expect a body composed solely of bones to be easily broken, but each bone felt stronger than steel when he touched them.

At the same time, he felt a strange sense of completion and satisfaction, that this was his real body, despite it being completely different from his old one. Perhaps it was because of this feeling that he was not afraid, despite his transfiguration into a set of white bones.

“Do you want more?”

Momonga raised the Pitcher as he asked the twins, who had finished their water.

“Er, thanks! I’ve drunk enough!”

“Is that so? Then, Mare, do you want some more?”

“Eep! Er, er, I, I’ve also had enough. I, I don’t feel thirsty any more.”

Momonga nodded as he took back the glasses, before returning them all into his pocket space.

Aura suddenly whispered, “I thought Momonga-sama would be scarier than this.”

“Oh? Really? Well, if you feel that way…”

“Now is good! It’s the best!”

“Then we’ll leave it at that.”

Momonga was taken somewhat aback by Aura’s passionate answer.

“Mo-Momonga-sama, are we the only ones that you’re nice to…?”
Momonga was unsure how to answer Aura’s muttered question. Instead, he patted her lightly on the head.

“Ehehehe.”

Aura looked like a puppy that had just seen something she liked, while Mare had a jealous look on his face. Just then, a voice rang out:

“Oya, am I the first to arrive?”

The tone was archaic and formal, but the voice itself sounded like it belonged to a young person. A shadow formed over the ground, and then the shadow turned into what looked like a door, from which a person emerged.

She wore a black ballgown which looked soft to the touch. Her skirt was puffed up into a voluminous bell shape. On top of that was a bolero edged with frills, lace and ribbons, as well as a pair of long silk gloves. Together, they covered up most of her skin.

Her skin was as pale as wax, and her looks could only be described as stunningly beautiful. Her long silver hair was tied up into a ponytail that descended from one side of her head, exposing her face. Her deep red pupils were filled with a seductive look of delight.

She looked to be 14 years old, or younger, and her innocent, youthful appearance combined the qualities of cuteness and beauty into a single whole. However, her breasts bulged proudly forward in a decidedly unchildlike manner.

"...Weren't you told not to frivolously use [Gate] in Nazarick? We *are* teleportation-warded, after all. You should be able to walk here, so shouldn't you have come on foot, Shalltear?"

The annoyed voice came from beside Momonga. There was no trace of its previous puppy-like obedience in those cold words, only a burning hostility.

Mare was trembling by the side, and he slowly edged himself away from his sister. In truth, the speed at which the leopard called Aura had changed its spots startled Momonga as well.

The girl who had come here via the highest tier of teleportation magic was called Shalltear. She did not even bother looking at Aura, who was scowling at her. Instead, she swiftly advanced before Momonga.

The bewitching scent of some kind of perfume hung around her.

"...Something stinks," Aura spat. Then, she followed up with, "Don't tell me you started rotting because you're undead?"

Perhaps she saw Momonga reflexively raising his hand to sniff himself, but Shalltear furrowed her brows unhappily and replied:

"...Is that not quite distasteful? Momonga-sama is undead as well."
"Hah? What nonsense are you talking, Shalltear? Momonga-sama is no mere undead being. He's more like a super undead, or a godly undead."

Momonga was somewhat baffled as he heard Shalltear and Mare going "Ah" and "Mm" respectively. The fact was that in YGGDRASIL, he considered himself to be an ordinary undead creature… which was what Momonga thought as he rounded his shoulders.

In any case, there were no such things as super or godly undead.

"But, but nee-chan, maybe you shouldn't have said that…"

"Is, is that so? All right, then, ah, take two, then. Ahem… Don't tell me you started rotting because you're a walking corpse."

“That… er, well, that seems okay, sort of.”

After agreeing with Aura’s take two, Shalltear placed her slender hands on the sides of Momonga’s head, as though to embrace it.

“Ah, my master, my beloved master, the only one whom I cannot rule over…”

Her carmine lips parted, revealing a moist, slick tongue. The tongue moved like a living creature as Shalltear lovingly licked her lips. Her fragrant breath wafted out from her open mouth.

Although she was perfectly suited for the role of an alluring seductress in all other ways, she was far too young for it. The gap between her expectations and reality was laughable. In addition, she was far too short. When she reached her hands out to hug Momonga, it looked like she wanted to hang from his neck instead.

However, this was too much affection for Momonga, who was not used to girls. He wanted to take a step back, but in the end he decided to stand his ground.

Is that how she really is? That thought echoed endlessly in his head. However, when Momonga thought about the fact that she had been designed by his comrade Peroroncino, he mused that she might have been designed with such a personality. After all, Peroroncino loved H-games and proudly declared that they were his life.

Shalltear Bloodfallen was made by such a rotten individual.

She was a “True Vampire”, the Guardian of the 1st to 3rd floors of the Great Tomb of Nazarick.

At the same time, she was a girl created by a H-game aficionado and her character design was filled with nods to various H-games.

“...That’s enough out of you…”

Shalltear reacted to the low growl for the first time. In a mocking tone, she told Aura, “Ara, are you still here, shorty? I couldn’t see you, so I thought you were gone.”

Momonga did not wish to add to what Shalltear had just said,

Aura's face was twitching uncontrollably, and then Shalltear ignored her and said to Mare, "It must be pretty tough for you, having to deal with a weirdo sister like that. You'd best leave her soon, lest you become a weirdo like her." Mare's face blanched instantly, because he knew Shalltear wanted to use him to start a fight.

However, Aura simply smiled. And then —

"Shut up, fake tits."

— She dropped a bombshell.

"...What the hell are you talking about—!"

Ah, her character's broken down, Momonga muttered under his breath.

Now that Shalltear's true nature had been revealed, she dropped the cultured act.

"Hmph, it's so obvious — damn, that is one weird chest, how many pads did you stuff in there?"

"Uwah — uwah —"

Shalltear was waving her hands in panic, as though she could disperse Aura's words with them, while she had a suitably childish expression on her face. On the other hand, Aura grinned evilly.

"You packed so much in there… it shifts when you run, right?"

"Kuhii!"

Shalltear made a strange noise as an extended finger poked her.

"I was right, wasn't I? Kukuku! Where have they gone—! So that's why you didn't run, even though you were worried, and instead you used a 'Gate'—"

“Shut up, shorty! It’s not like you have anything of your own! At least I… no, I’ve got a lot more to show off!”

Aura simply grinned in the face of Shalltear’s desperate counterattack. A shocked Shalltear stumbled back, and reflexively covered up her chest. It was a sorry sight.

“...I’m only 76, and I’ve got lots more time to grow, unlike an undead with no future like you. Ah, how sad — you will never grow again~”

Shalltear moaned in frustration and took another step back. There was a desperate, harried look on her face, which only made Aura smile in a frightening manner.

“To think you’re actually happy with that bust of yours — Hmph!”

Momonga imagined he could hear Shalltear snapping.

“You shitty brat—! It’s too late to regret your words now—!”

Roiling black mist boiled off Shalltear’s hands. Aura readied her whip in anticipation. Momonga and Mare, watching from the side, were at a loss for words.

The scene before Momonga’s eyes was vaguely familiar, and he wondered if he should stop them.

Peroroncino-san, who designed Shalltear, and Bukubukuchagama-san, who designed Aura and Mare, were younger brother and elder sister, and at times they would argue in a friendly manner, like what was happening now.

Momonga recalled the forms of his former comrades as he stood behind the quarrelling pair.

“What. A. Ruckus.”

The inhuman voice came just as Momonga was reminiscing about the past. The strange, monotonous voice finally silenced the two of them.

As he turned to look at the voice's origin, he saw a heteromorphic being shrouded in chilled air.

It stood two and a half meters tall, and resembled a bipedal insect. It looked like some fiend had melded a praying mantis and an ant together. It had a tail that was twice as long as its body, and it was covered in sharp spikes which resembled icicles. Its powerful-looking mandibles looked like they could sever a man's arm in a single bite.

It grasped a platinum halberd in two of its hands, and in its other two hands were a masterfully-made mace wreathed in a black aura, and a gnarled-looking broadsword which did not look like it could be sheathed.

It was surrounded by a frightening aura of cold. Its exoskeleton was a dull blue color and sparkled like diamond dust. Protrusions which looked like icebergs bulged up from its back and shoulders.

He was the Guardian of the Fifth Floor, the "Ruler of Glaciers", Cocytus.

The hilt of his halberd slammed into the arena floor, and the ground around it began to freeze.

"You. Stand. Before. A. Supreme. Being. Contain. Yourself."

"This brat started it!"

"Actually—"

"Awawawa…"

Shalltear and Aura locked gazes, while Mare panicked from the side. Momonga could not hold it in any longer, and curtly addressed the two of them.

"...Shalltear, Aura. Playtime is over."

The two of them shuddered in shock, then lowered their heads simultaneously.

“My sincerest apologies!” they said in unison.

Momonga magnanimously accepted their apologies with a nod. Then, he turned and said, “Cocytus, you’ve come.”

“I. Came. Immediately. Upon. Receiving. Your. Summons. Momonga-sama.”

The water in the air froze with a crackling sound as it made contact with the white vapor puffing out of Cocytus’ mouth as he spoke. This cold was every bit as frigid as the Primal Fire Elemental was hot. Anyone standing near him would suffer the effects of the lowered temperature, and they might even sustain frostbite. However, Momonga did not feel anything. The fact was that everyone here was resistant to fire, cold and acid attacks, or had some way to deal with them.

“You must have been very free with no intruders around, no?”

“Indeed.”

The clacking from his lower mandibles sounded like the threatening noises of a wasp. However, Momonga had the feeling that he was laughing.

“Even. So. There. Are. Still. Things. Which. Must. Be. Done. So. I. Was. Not. Free. At. All.”

“Oh? Things that had to be done? What things were these, may I ask?”

“Training. In. Order. To. Be. Ready. To. Deploy. At. Any. Time.”

Although it was not too obvious from his appearance, Cocytus was designed to be the quintessential warrior, be it in personality or body. Therefore, from the perspective of a weapon user, his attacks were the strongest in the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick.

“You’ve done all this for me. You’ve worked hard. My thanks.”

“After. Hearing. Your. Praise. The. Task. Is. Not. As. Tiring. I. See. Demiurge. And. Albedo. Have. Arrived.”

Momonga turned in the direction Cocytus was looking, at the entrance of the Colosseum, where he saw two figures enter. The one in front was Albedo, while a man followed behind her like a lackey. Once she got close enough, Albedo smiled to Momonga and bowed deeply.

The man bowed and said, “Forgive me for keeping everyone waiting.”

He was about 180cm tall, and his skin was darkened from the sun. His facial features looked to be Oriental, while his jet-black hair was neatly combed back. The eyes under his pince-nez glasses could not even be said to be narrowed. It was doubtful whether they were actually open at all.

He was dressed in a Western suit, with a matching tie. He gave the impression of being a professional businessman, or a skilled lawyer.

However, his gentlemanly appearance was hard-pressed to hide the evil air about him. A tail sheathed in silvery metal extended behind him, tipped by six sharp spikes. He was limned by flickering black flames.

This man was the “Creator of Blazing Inferno”, Demiurge.

He was the Guardian of the 7th Floor of the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick. This demon was designed to be the defense commander of the NPCs.

“It seems everyone is here.”

“—Momonga-sama, there are two more people who have not yet arrived,” said a resonant voice that seemed to pour into one’s heart.

Demiurge’s words were empowered by a passive skill. This skill was called [Command Mantra], and it could instantly turn the weak-minded into puppets dancing on Demiurge’s strings.

However, this skill had no effect on the people present. It was only useful on people below level 40, so to everyone here, it simply sounded good.

“No. Those two Guardians are only to be moved under special circumstances. Therefore, there is no need to call them over at the moment.”

“I see.”

“...My. Allies. Have. Not. Arrived. Yet.”

Aura and Shalltear froze as they heard those words, and the smile froze on Albedo’s face.

“...That, that fellow is just an Area Guardian in one of the floors which I… which we are in charge of.”

“Y-yes…”

Shalltear and Aura smiled stiffly, while Albedo nodded vigorously in agreement.

“...Kyouhukou, is it. Indeed, it would be good to inform the various Area Guardians. Then, let the Area Guardians like Guren and Grant know about it as well. I will leave that task to the various Floor Guardians.”

There were two kinds of Guardians in the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick.

Floor Guardians, like the ones before Momonga at the moment, were responsible for one or more floors. Area Guardians were responsible for an individual area within a floor. Simply put, the Floor Guardians were in charge of the Area Guardians, who were in turn in charge of a specific domain. Since there were many of them, they were individually not very important. In Nazarick, the term Guardian usually referred to a Floor Guardian.

After the various Floor Guardians showed that they understood Momonga’s orders, Albedo commanded:

“Then, everyone, let us pledge our loyalty to the Supreme One.”

All the Guardians nodded as one, and before Momonga could interrupt, they had lined up before him. Albedo stood at their head, while the other Guardians formed a line behind her. All the Guardians had solemn, respectful expressions. They showed no sign of playing around.

Shalltear, who stood on one end of the line, stepped forward:

“Shalltear Bloodfallen, Guardian of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Floors, presents herself to the Master.”

She went to one knee, one hand pressed against her chest, and bowed deeply. After that, Cocytus stepped forward and said:

“Cocytus. Guardian. Of. The. 5th. Floor. Presents. Himself. To. The. Master.”

Much like Shalltear had, he knelt before Momonga like a vassal before a lord. Then, it was the twin dark elves’ turn:

“The Guardian of the 6th Floor, Aura Bella Fiora, presents herself to the Master.”

“Al-also a Guardian of the 6th Floor, Mare Bello Fiore, presents himself to the Master.”

They knelt respectfully and lowered their heads to Momonga. Shalltear, Cocytus, Aura and Mare all had different bodies and thus they should have each taken their steps forward differently. Yet, the way with which they knelt was identical, and they lined up neatly.

After that, Demiurge advanced in a dignified manner.

“The Guardian of the 7th Floor, Demiurge, presents himself to the Master.”

Following his crisp words, Demiurge went to one knee in a graceful descent, as though expressing his heart through his actions. Finally, Albedo stepped forward as well.

“The Guardian Overseer Albedo presents herself to the Master.”

She smiled to Momonga, and knelt like the other Guardians. However, Albedo continued speaking in a high and clear voice as she delivered her report to Momonga.

“With the exception of the 4th Floor Guardian Gargantua and the 8th Floor Guardian Victim, all the Floor Guardians are gathered before you. Thus do we offer up our utmost loyalty to the Master.”

Momonga could not speak as he looked at the six lowered heads before him. A strange pressure veiled the entire area, and perhaps only Momonga could bear the painful, crushing air.

—He did not know how to proceed.

He had never seen anything like this before in his life. In his confusion, Momonga accidentally activated a skill. A dreadful aura roiled out over the surroundings, and a halo of black radiance formed behind him.

Momonga had no time to cancel the skill as he frantically racked his brains to recall a scene from movies or television which would tell him how to respond appropriately here.

“Raise your heads.”

With a *sha*, everyone raised their heads. Their coordination was so immaculate that Momonga wondered if they had practiced that movement together.

“Then… first, I thank all of you for coming here.”

“There is no need for thanks. We are all Momonga-sama’s loyal subordinates. To us, Momonga-sama is our supreme overlord.”

None of the Guardians opposed her statement. As expected of the Guardian Overseer.

Momonga looked on the Guardians with a stern face, and he felt a choking sensation in his nonexistent throat. It was the weight of being a leader bearing down on him.

In addition, any orders he gave now would affect his relationship with them in the future. He could not help but hesitate as he contemplated the possibilities.

Would he lead the Great Tomb of Nazarick to destruction because of his decisions — the unease generated by that thought flooded his heart and mind.

"...Momonga-sama, it is only natural that you should have doubts about us. After all, our abilities must be miniscule in your reckoning."

Albedo removed the smile from her face, and continue in a respectful tone that was laced with a stern strength.

"However, if Momonga-sama gives the order, we — all the Guardians will accomplish any task set to us, no matter how difficult or arduous, with every fiber of our beings. We hereby swear that we will never allow the 41 Supreme Beings of Ainz Ooal Gown, our creators, to be disgraced by our actions."

"This we swear!"

The Floor Guardians chimed in right after Albedo. Their voices were filled with power, and that adamant loyalty and determination would not be diminished by any number of foes. It was as though they were mocking Momonga's previous worries that the NPCs might betray him.

The darkness in his heart vanished like shadows in the morning sun. Momonga was moved to the bottom of his heart that the NPCs designed by the members of Ainz Ooal Gown were possessed of such excellence.

The golden radiance of the past still remained.

The embodiment of everyone's hard work, their cunningly crafted creations, were still here. It filled him with joy.

Momonga smiled, although his skeletal face could not display any emotions. The points of crimson light in his eye sockets seemed to shine exceptionally bright. His prior unease had was no longer existent, and he simply spoke the words expected of a guildmaster.

"Excellent. Guardians, I know that you will understand my aims and successfully carry out my commands. There may be some things which are difficult to understand, but I hope you will pay attention and listen. I believe

the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick has been caught up in some kind of unknown situation."

The Guardians' faces were still stern, and there was no trace of surprise on them.

"Although I do not know what has caused this incident, the Great Tomb of Nazarick has been transported from its place in the swamps to a vast plain. Did anyone foresee the occurrence of this strange event?"

Albedo looked back at the Guardians, and after seeing the reply written on their face, she said:
"Regretfully, none of us have any idea of what is going on."

"Then, I have a question for the Floor Guardians. Have any of you discovered anything strange in your floors?"

After hearing this, each Floor Guardian responded:

"There are no abnormalities in the 7th Floor."

"Same with the 6th Floor."

"I-it's as nee-chan says."

"The. 5th. Floor. Is. The. Same."

"Nothing strange has been sighted in the 1st to 3rd Floors."

"—Momonga-sama, I shall investigate the 4th and 8th Floors right away."

"Then I will leave that matter to Albedo. However, you must be careful on the 8th Floor. If an emergency situation occurs there, a situation may emerge that you cannot deal with."

Albedo bowed her head deeply to indicate she understood, and then Shalltear said:

"Then, I shall handle matters on the surface."

“There is no need. Sebas is currently reconnoitering the surface.”

Surprise flashed across the faces of Albedo and the other Guardians.

In the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick, there were four NPCs who were exponents of melee combat. Cocytus had the strongest attack power when using a weapon, Albedo had an impregnable defense when in her heavy armor, while Sebas in his true form was stronger than either of them two in melee combat. And then was one more, who was superior to all of them.

There could be no other reason for the Guardians’ surprise. Sebas, who could sweep away anyone before him in hand-to-hand combat, had been assigned to the simple task of reconnaissance. They could tell how seriously Momonga was taking this strange occurrence, and everyone was on their guard as a result.

“It’s about time for him to return.”

Just then, Momonga saw Sebas jogging over to them, until he reached the Guardians genuflecting before Momonga and went to one knee as well.

“Momonga-sama, forgive my lateness.”

“It’s fine. Then, your report on the surrounding conditions.”

Sebas raised his head and looked around at the Guardians kneeling beside him.

“...The situation is critical, so obviously the Floor Guardians would need to know as well.”

“Yes. To begin with, the terrain surrounding us for a kilometer in each direction is a plain. There are no signs of man-made structures. I spotted some small animals, but there were no humanoid or large creatures.”
“Were those small animals monsters?”

“No, they were life-forms which had no combat power.”

"...I see. Then, were the plains you spoke of covered in frozen grass which would cut you as you passed them?"

"No, it was simple grass. There was nothing special about it."

"And you did not see any sky castles or similar buildings?"

"No, I did not. There was no sign of man-made illumination in the sky or on the land."

"I see, so there was only a starry sky… Thank you for your hard work, Sebas."

As he praised Sebas for his efforts, Momonga was somewhat disappointed because he had not obtained any useful information.

However, he was slowly realizing that he was no longer in the game world of YGGDRASIL, although he did not understand why he could use YGGDRASIL's equipment and use its spells.

He did not know why they had come here, but it would be wise to heighten Nazarick's combat readiness just in case. For all he knew, this might be someone else's territory, and he might be censured for having come here without permission. No, he would be lucky if that was all that happened.

"Guardians, increase the readiness of each floor by one level. We are unsure of what has happened, so do not act incautiously. If you encounter an intruder, do not slay them, but capture them alive at all costs. When you capture them, do as little harm to them as possible. I apologise for imposing such demands on all of you at a time like this."

The Guardians voiced their acknowledgement and nodded in unison.

"Next, I would like to understand the administrative operations of the Tomb. Albedo, how is the exchange of security information between the Guardians of the various floors?"

In YGGDRASIL, the Guardians were simple NPCs, and they could only act according to their programs. There was no way the floors would exchange security information and monsters.

“Each Floor is administered by its respective Floor Guardian, but Demiurge is the overall defense commander, and everyone can share information with him.”

Momonga was a bit surprised, but then he nodded in satisfaction.

“Excellent. Nazarick’s defense commander, Demiurge. Guardian Overseer, Albedo. The two of you will be in charge of drawing up a more comprehensive administrative system for Nazarick.”

“Understood. Will the plans for the management system include the 8th, 9th and 10th floors?”

“The 8th Floor is managed by Victim, so it’ll be fine. No, entry to the 8th Floor is forbidden. I rescind the order I just gave to Albedo as well. In short, entry to the 8th Floor will only be effected with my permission. I will undo the seal and permit direct access from the 7th Floor to the 9th Floor. After that, plan for the 9th and 10th Floor as one whole.”

“Is, is that your will?”

Albedo seemed quite surprised. Behind her, Demiurge’s eyes went wide, revealing his thoughts on the matter.

“Will the underlings be allowed to tramp through the domain of the Supreme Beings? Must they be given that much freedom?”

The underlings in question were not the NPCs and monsters designed by the members of Ainz Ooal Gown, but the automatically spawned (pop) monsters from the dungeon. The fact was that the 9th and 10th Floor lacked such monsters, barring very rare exceptions.

Momonga muttered to himself.

Albedo seemed to regard that place as a holy sanctuary, but that was not the case.

The reason why there were no pop monsters on the 9th Floor was simply because if any intruders could overcome the NPC defenders of the 8th Floor, the most powerful beings in the Tomb, then Ainz Ooal Gown's chances of victory would be slim. Thus, it would be better to play the role of a villain to the hilt, and meet the invaders in the throne room for a final showdown.

"...It will be fine. Because it's an emergency, we need extra hands for security."

"Understood. I shall select only the finest and most potent troops for this duty."

Momonga nodded, and looked toward the twins.

"Aura and Mare… can you conceal the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick? Simple illusions don't seem very reliable, and thinking about the cost of illusions gives me a headache."

Aura and Mare looked at each other and began thinking. After a while, Mare spoke up:

"U-using magic might be tricky. If we had to hide everything along with the surface… although, we could cover the walls in mud, and then add plants as camouflage."

"Do you intend to soil the glorious walls of Nazarick with base dirt?"

Albedo said that with her back turned to Mare. Although her voice was sweet and velvet, the tone it carried was anything but.

Mare's shoulders trembled, and although the surrounding Guardians remained silent, their attitudes suggested that they shared Albedo's opinion.

In contrast, Momonga felt Albedo was being too much of a busybody. The situation was hardly serious enough to warrant such a reaction.

"Albedo… don't speak out of turn. I am addressing Mare."

His voice was so deep that it surprised Momonga himself.

“Ah, my deepest apologies, Momonga-sama!”

Albedo’s head was as low as it could go, and her face was frozen in fear. The Guardians and Sebas stiffened up as well. Perhaps they thought that scolding was directed at them as well.

A twinge of remorse struck Momonga as he observed the quick change in the Guardians’ attitude, but he continued speaking to Mare:

“Can you conceal the walls by heaping dirt onto them?”

“Yes, yes I can, if you allow it, Momonga-sama … However…”

“Yes, an observer from a distance would think the ground was bulging up unnaturally. Sebas, are there any nearby hills or the like?”

“There are none. Regretfully, we are surrounded by flatlands. However, since there are nights here, we should be able to perform some sort of eye-deceiving camouflage while the sun is down.”

“Is that so… if all we intend to do is hide the walls, Mare’s idea will be enough. Then, what if we piled up the dirt from the nearby land to make dummy hills as camouflage?”

“Then we would blend in.”

“Very well. I shall assign Aura and Mare to carry out this task together. While doing so, you may draw the necessary supplies from each Floor. Since we cannot camouflage the view from the air, we shall use illusions after finishing the earthworks, so nobody will be able to detect Nazarick from the outside.”

“Y-yes. U-understood.”

That was all he could think of at the moment. There were probably a lot of holes left in the plan, but that could be dealt with slowly, later on. After all, it had only been a few hours since all this had happened.

“Then, you are dismissed for today. Everyone, take a break before beginning your duties. There are many things we do not know, so do not push yourselves too hard.”

The Guardians nodded as one to show that they understood.

“Finally, I have a question for the Guardians. To begin with, Shalltear — what kind of person am I to you?”

“An incarnation of beauty. You are the most beautiful person in the world. Even jewels pale in comparison to your snow-white body.”

Shalltear did not pause to think about her answer before she gave it. From the lack of delay in her reply, she must have been speaking from the heart.

“—Cocytus.”

“One. Who. Is. Mightier. Than. All. The. Guardians. And. Deserving. Of. The. Title. Of. The. Supreme. Overlord. Of. The. Great. Underground. Tomb. Of. Nazarick.”

“—Aura.”

“A merciful leader with great foresight.”

“—Mare.”

“A, a very gentle person.”

“—Demiurge.”

“A wise leader who makes decisions and acts on them quickly. Truly, a man worthy of the title ‘inscrutable.’.”

“—Sebas.”

“The one responsible for assembling all the Supreme Beings. In addition, the merciful leader who did not abandon us, but stayed by our side until the very end.”

“And finally, Albedo.”

“The man who rules over the Supreme Beings, and our highest, most exalted master. In addition, the man I love most deeply.”

“...I see. I have heard and understand your opinions. Then, I shall hand the tasks that were once performed by my former comrades to you. Carry them out faithfully.”

After seeing the Guardians genuflect once more, Momonga teleported away.

The scenery before his eyes changed in an instant, from the Colosseum to the chamber of the Golems of Lemegeton. After looking around to make sure nobody was looking, Momonga sighed deeply.

“I’m so tired…”

Although his body did not feel tired, the mental fatigue was weighing down on his shoulders.

“...Those guys… why do they think so highly of me?”

They were describing someone else entirely. After hearing the Guardians take turns to share their opinions of him, he wanted to laugh and mock them, but from the looks on their faces, it did not sound like they were joking at all.

In other words, their words were sincere.

If he did not act in a manner which fit their views of him, it might disappoint them. As he thought about that, the pressure on him grew and grew. And in addition to that, there was another problem, which made Momonga frown.

Of course, his skeletal face could not show expressions, yet it seemed as though it did.

“...What should I do about Albedo… if this keeps up, how will I face Tabula-san…”

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INTERMISSION

The pressure that was crushing their heads to the ground suddenly vanished.

Even after the departure of the master of their revered creators, nobody raised their heads. After a while, someone sighed in relief. The tense atmosphere was gone now.

The first to get up was Albedo. Her white dress was stained where her knee had touched the ground, but she did not mind at all. She flapped her wings to swipe off the dirt on her feathers.

After seeing Albedo rise, the others followed suit, though nobody dared to speak.

“That, that was scary, nee-chan.”

“Yeah, I thought I’d be squashed flat.”

“As expected of Momonga-sama, to think his presence would have such a great effect on us Floor Guardians…”

“As. A. Supreme. Being. His. Might. Overmatches. Ours. But. I. Did. Not. Expect. Him. To. Be. This. Powerful.”

Thus the Guardians shared their impressions of Momonga.

The aura that Momonga emitted was the source of the power that had crushed the Guardians to the ground .

[Despair Aura].

Besides inflicting a fear effect, it could reduce the stats of its victims. Normally, it would not have an effect on the level 100 NPCs, but on this occasion, its effects had been strengthened by the Staff of Ainz Ooal Gown.

“Momonga-sama must have unleashed the air of authority that represents his right to rule.”

“Indeed. Before we stated our positions, Momonga-sama did not exert his might. However, once we showed ourselves in the role of Floor Guardians, he must have revealed a fraction of his awesome power to us.”

“In. Other. Words. Momonga-sama. Revealed. His. Face. As. A. Ruler. In. Response. To. Our. Pledges. Of. Loyalty.”

“That does seem like the case.”

“He didn’t radiate that aura when he was with us. Momonga-sama was kind, and gave us something to drink when we were thirsty.”

Aura’s words caused the other Guardians to emit an air of tension. It was condensed jealousy that was almost visible to the naked eye. The worst-off was Albedo, whose clenched fist was trembling and whose nails threatened to rip through the fabric of her glove.

Mare’s shoulders trembled, and then his eyes went wide.

“That, that must have been the true power of Momonga-sama, the ruler of the Great Tomb of Nazarick. It was amazing!”

That changed the mood instantly.

“Exactly! He showed us his ability as an absolute ruler in response to our feelings… as expected of our creator. The zenith of the 41 Supreme Beings, and the kind master who remained here with us until the very end.”

Albedo’s words put a blissful look on all the Guardians’ faces, although the expression on Mare’s face was better described as “relaxed”.

There was nothing which could delight them more than the master who created them, the master to whom they owed their utmost loyalty, revealing his true face to them.

The Guardians, no, every entity created by the Supreme Beings wanted nothing more than to aid their creators in some way. The next best thing would be to receive their trust and to be treated as useful servants.

This was a simple, natural truth.

This was the greatest joy in life for these characters who were created to aid the Supreme Beings. Then, as though to wipe away this jubilant atmosphere, Sebas said from the side:

“Then, I shall take my leave first. I do not know where Momonga-sama has gone, but I should stay by his side.”

Jealousy was written all over Albedo’s face, but she quashed her feelings and replied:

“I understand. Then, Sebas, serve Momonga-sama well and do not disgrace him. Report to me if anything happens. In particular, if Momonga-sama summons me, you must let me know immediately. Everything else is of secondary importance to that!”

A pained expression crossed Demiurge’s face as he listened quietly from the side.

“But if he desires me in his bedchamber, you must inform Momonga-sama that I might be a while, in order to bathe and cleanse myself for him. Of course, if he wants me to proceed to him immediately, that is fine as well. After all, I do my best to keep clean for him, and my clothes have already been selected so I can heed his call whenever it comes. In any case, Momonga-sama’s wishes will always come first—”

“—I understand, Albedo. If I waste too much time here, I will not have enough to properly serve Momonga-sama, which would be disrespectful. Therefore, forgive my abrupt departure, but I must take my leave. Floor Guardians, I bid you all a good day.”

After saying his farewells to the wide-eyed and open-mouthed Guardians, Sebas immediately jogged away, as though to leave Albedo (who was preparing for a long monologue) behind.

“Speaking of which… it is fairly quiet around here. Shalltear, is something the matter?”

After Demiurge’s question, everyone’s eyes went to Shalltear. She was still on her knees.

“What. Is. Wrong. Shalltear?”

She lifted her head after she was called on again. The dazed look on her face would make people think that she had just been woken up.

“…What. Happened?”
“Ah, after being exposed to Momonga-sama’s awesome presence, I could not help but get excited… I fear my underwear has gone through a bit of a crisis…”

Silence.

Everyone looked at each other, unsure of what to say. The Guardians mused that Shalltear had, by far, the most fetishes among them, and that one of said fetishes was necrophilia. They facepalmed as they thought about this, although Mare didn’t quite get it and was thoroughly confused. No, one of the Guardians was not content to simply shake her head and sigh.

That was Albedo.

The jealousy surging in her made Albedo come out and say:

“You slut.”

Shalltear sensed Albedo’s hostility as she heard those scornful words. Her lips curled in hostility, and she responded with a bewitching smile.

“What? Having Momonga-sama, the most beautiful of the Supreme Beings, bless us with his energy is a reward! Anyone who doesn’t get wet from that

must have something wrong in their head! Or could it be that you don't just look pure, but you don't have any fleshly desires at all, you big-mouthed gorilla?!"

"...Lamprey!"

The two of them glared at each other. The Guardians did not know if they would fight as a result of this, but the way they were looking at each other was very unsettling.

"My appearance was created by the Supreme Beings, do you have a problem with it?"

"Shouldn't I be saying that?"

Shalltear slowly raised herself, and the two of them closed in on each other. Even so, their eyes remained locked. Eventually, the two of them came so close that they collided into each other.

"Don't think you've won just because you're the Guardian Overseer and can stay next to Momonga-sama. If you really think that way, I'll laugh my ass off."

"Hmph. That's correct. While you're stationed in a faraway place, I'll swoop in and achieve a complete victory."

"...What do you mean by 'a complete victory'? Teach me, Guardian Overseer-sama."

"As a slut, you should be fully aware of what that means."

Throughout their trade of verbal barbs, neither of them had turned their gaze from each other. They simply looked into each other's eyes with a blank expression on their faces.

With a *pacha*, Albedo unfurled her wings in a threat display. Black mist wreathed Shalltear as she responded in kind, unwilling to admit weakness.

“Ah — Aura, matters between women should be settled by a fellow woman. If anything happens I’ll come to help, let me know when the time comes, all right?”
“Hey, wait, Demiurge! Are you planning to dump all of this on me?”

Demiurge simply waved lazily as he walked away from the feuding pair. Cocytus and Mare took a step back as well. Nobody wanted to get drawn in by them.

“Really, do they have to argue over this sort of thing?”

“Personally, I would be quite interested in the result.”

“What do you mean by ‘the result’, Demiurge?”

“I refer to the increase in our fighting power, the future of Nazarick, and so on.”

“D-Demiurge, what do you mean?”

“Hmm…”

Demiurge pondered how he should answer Mare’s question. For a moment, an evil impulse swept through Demiurge’s head and he thought of infusing the simple Mare with adult knowledge, but he promptly discarded that line of thinking.

Demiurge was a devil, and he was cruel and ruthless, but that only applied to people outside Nazarick. To Demiurge, the characters made by the 41 Supreme Beings were his comrades.

“Any great leader requires a successor, no? Momonga-sama may have stayed with us until the end, but if he loses interest in us one day, he may leave for another place like the rest of the Supreme Beings. Thus, there is a need for a successor to whom we can pledge our loyalty.”

“I see. Then, which of us will be Momonga-sama’s successor?”

“How. Disrespectful. As. Guardians. We. Are. To. Serve. Momonga-sama. Faithfully. So. He. May. Stay. That. Is. What. We. Were. Made. For.”

Demiurge turned to the interrupting Cocytus.

“Of course I understand that, Cocytus. But do you not wish to pledge your loyalty to Momonga-sama’s heir?”

“Hmm… Of. Course. I. Would. Like. To. Swear. My. Allegiance. To. Momonga-sama’s. Heir…”

Cocytus began imagining himself running around with said heir on his shoulders.

Then he began imagining himself teaching him swordsmanship, drawing his blade to defend the Young Master, and even hearing the full-grown Young Master giving him orders.

“...Oh. How. Wonderful. What. A Glorious. Sight… Uncle… Uncle…”

Somewhat unable to bear it, Demiurge averted his eyes from Cocytus, who was fully into imagining himself as a cool old uncle, faithfully serving Momonga’s heir.

“Well, that aside, I’m quite interested in knowing what our children can do for the strengthening of the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick. How about it, Mare, do you want to make a child?”

“Er, eh?”

“Still, you don’t have a partner… if you discover any Humans, Dark Elves, Wood Elves or similar species, would you kindly capture them for me?”

“Eh? Ehhhhh?”

After thinking for a bit, Mare nodded and said, “If, if it helps Momonga-sama... I’m willing to contribute. But how will I have children?”

“Well, I’ll teach you about that when the time comes. But if you decide to try some breeding experiments on your own, Momonga-sama might scold you. After all, the operations of Nazarick are perfectly balanced.”

“That, that’s true. I’ve heard that all the underlings were created after careful calculation by one of the Supreme Beings… If we carelessly increase our numbers, we’ll be scolded. I, I don’t want to be scolded by Momonga-sama…”

“Of course, I don’t want to be rebuked by the Supreme Beings either… if only I could set up a farm outside Nazarick…”

As Demiurge thought of this, he decided to mention the one thing nobody had teased him about:

“Ah yes, Mare, why are you dressed as a girl?”

Mare grabbed at his miniskirt to hide his legs after Demiurge asked his question.

“This was Bukubukuchagama-sama’s decision. She said this was called a ‘trap’, so it should have nothing to do with my gender.”

“Oh, so this was Bukubukuchagama-sama’s decision. Well then, those clothes should be fine on you… although, should all boys dress in that way?”

“I, I don’t know about that.”

The 41 Supreme Beings were no longer around, but even so, the mention of their names still compelled obedience. Or rather, in the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick, Mare was dressed as he should be, and nobody apart from another Supreme Being could change his wardrobe.

“...I wonder if I should talk to Momonga-sama about this. Perhaps all boys should be dressed like that. I say… Cocytus, it’s time to wake up.”

After hearing his colleague’s words, Cocytus shook his head several times, a deeply satisfied smile on his face.

“Ah. What. A. Beautiful. Sight… Truly. it. Was. Everything. I. Have. Ever. Dreamed. Of.”

“Is that so… well then, that’s good.... Are Albedo and Shalltear still fighting?”

The feuding pair’s eyes were slightly averted. However, the one that answered Demiurge was the tired-looking Aura, standing by the side.

“They’re… done. Right now, they’re arguing about…”

“The problem of who should be the first wife.”

“It would be strange for the ruler of the Great Tomb of Nazarick to only have one wife. The question now is who is worthy of being Momonga-sama’s first wife…”

“...While that is quite an interesting question, we should probably discuss that later. All right, Albedo, won’t you give us our orders? There will be many things to do later on.”

“Indeed, you’re right. I need to issue orders soon. Shalltear, I’ll discuss this matter with you at length soon enough. We’ll need to spend some time on it.”

“I have no objections, Albedo. No other matter is more worthy of our time.”

“Very well. Then, let us move on to our plans for the future.”

After seeing Albedo recover her dignity as the Guardian Overseer, all the Floor Guardians lowered their heads in respect. However, they did not genuflect.

Of course, they had to show their respect to the Guardian Overseer Albedo, but she was not their master. While the 41 Supreme Beings had set her over all the other characters that they had created, but even the position of Guardian Overseer was merely one set down by the 41 Supreme Beings, and as such the other Guardians needed only to pay her the respect due to her station. Thus, they lowered their heads to her. On her part, Albedo was not angry at this, because she knew that was the most correct course of action.

“Firstly—”

第三章 卡恩村之戰

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CHAPTER 3

BATTLE OF CARNE VILLAGE

Part 1

The dressing room which adjoined Momonga's suite was a chaotic mess of items, with hardly any place to put one's feet. There were items like capes, with which Momonga could equip himself, and suits of full plate armor, which he could not use at all. In addition to armor and other protectives, there were weapons ranging from magic staves to great swords. This was truly an assortment of gear.

Players could produce a nearly infinite variety of original magic items in YGGDRASIL. Defeated monsters dropped data crystals, which formed a magic item when they were set into an item skin.

Therefore, people would immediately buy item skins that they liked.

That was the reason for this room's state.

Momonga picked out a greatsword from the weapons in the room. Freed from its sheath, the silvery blade sparkled in the light. The runes carved into the blade's body sparkled as well, etching themselves into any onlookers' eyes.

Momonga swung the greatsword around. It was as light as a feather.

Of course, this was not because the blade was light, but because Momonga was very strong.

Momonga was a mage and his spellcasting stats were very high, but his physical stats were lower in comparison. Still, the strength he had gained from reaching level 100 was not an inconsiderable figure. If he encountered weak monsters, he could easily pulverize them with his staff.

Momonga slowly took a fighting stance, and then a loud sound of metallic clanging ran through the room. The sword he had been holding a moment ago was now on the ground

The maid standing by in the room immediately picked up the greatsword and handed it to Momonga. However, Momonga did not pick it up, but looked at his empty hands.

That was it.

That was what confused Momonga.

Although the realistic NPCs made him think he was no longer in a game, the annoying sensation that bound his body made him feel otherwise.

In YGGDRASIL, Momonga had no levels in warrior classes, and so he should not have been able to use a greatsword. However, if this new world was reality, it only made sense that he should have been able to wield it.

Momonga shook his head and decided not to think about it. After all, he would not be able to find the answer no matter how much he pondered.

“Tidy this up.”

After Momonga directed the maid to clean up, he turned to look at the mirror that almost covered the entire wall. What he saw was a clothed skeleton.

He should have been afraid after seeing what his body had become, but Momonga was unmoved. Indeed, it even felt natural to be that way.

There was another reason for this, besides being used to this look from his time in YGGDRASIL.

That reason was that his mind had been changed, along with his body.

The first sign of that was the fact that whenever he felt an intense surge in his emotions, he would immediately calm down, as though something was suppressing it. Another thing was that he could not feel thirst, hunger or

fatigue. There might have been something resembling lust, but he had felt no excitement even when he was caressing Albedo's soft breasts.

A terrible sense of loss filled Momonga, and he instinctively glanced down to his waist.

"Could it be… it vanished because I never used it?"

However, his small voice and the sense of loss vanished as he spoke.

Therefore, Momonga concluded that these changes, in particular the mental changes, were part of the undead immunity to mind-affecting effects.

Right now, he possessed an undead body and mind, but there were some remnants of his humanity left. Therefore, even when he experienced emotions, if they surged to a peak, they would be immediately suppressed. If he continued on like this, he might end up losing all his emotions in the future.

Of course, even if that happened, it would hardly be a big deal, because no matter how this world turned out or what happened to his body, his will was still his own.

In addition, the NPCs like Shalltear and so on would be by his side. Perhaps worrying about becoming undead was premature.

"[Create Greater Item]!"

Once Momonga cast the spell, his body was sheathed in a suit of engraved full plate armor. It glowed darkly, and its surface was covered in gold and silver patterns. It looked very expensive.

He moved around in it to see how it felt. Although it was somewhat restrictive, he was not immobilized. In addition, the armor fit his body very well, which was quite unexpected considering the gaps between his bare-boned body and the armor.

It would seem that he could use magic-generated items, just like in YGGDRASIL.

As Momonga silently applauded the wonders of magic, he peeked at himself in the mirror from between the gaps of his closed helm. A dashing warrior looked back at him, nothing at all like a magician. Momonga nodded in satisfaction, and gulped in his nonexistent throat. Right now, he understood how a child felt when he angered his parents.

“I will be stepping out for a while.”

“The guards are ready for you,” the maid reflexively replied. However—

The truth was, he disliked them.

On the first day when the guards followed him around, he felt pressurized; on the second he was used to it, and then he felt like showing them off. And on the third day—-

Momonga suppressed the urge to sigh.

It was all too stiff and formal for him. The guards followed him everywhere he went, and whenever he met someone, they bowed to him.

Maybe, if he could have walked around nonchalantly with his guards in tow, it would have been tolerable. But he could not do that, because he had to maintain the gravitas of the ruler of the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick at all times. He could not allow a moment of laxity to ruin his image, so his nerves were constantly on edge. This caused a lot of stress to the formerly-human Momonga.

Even though strong emotions were promptly suppressed, his mind felt like it was being boiled by a low flame all the time.

And then there were the unbelievably beautiful women who plastered themselves to his side at all times, taking care of him in all ways. As a man, he was delighted by the attention, but the invasion of his personal space and his life was wearing him out as well.

That stress was another relic of his humanity.

In any case, it was not a good sign that he, the master of Nazarick, was being subjected to this emotional distress amidst these strange circumstances. It might lead to him making a poor decision in times of emergency.

He needed to refresh himself.

Momonga's eyes went wide as he came to that decision. His expression did not change, of course, but the lights in his eyes burned brighter.

"No... there is no need for the guards to accompany me. I simply wish to walk by myself."

"Pl-please wait and reconsider, if something happens to Momonga-sama, we must become your shields. We cannot allow any harm to come to your person."

The maids and the other vassals wanted nothing more than to protect their master even at the cost of their own lives. In that sense, Momonga's request to go walking by himself -- which completely disregarded their feelings -- was a cruel one.

However, it had been over three days since this abnormality occurred, roughly 73 hours. In this time, Momonga had been desperately trying to maintain the stern facade of the ruler of the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick, but now he needed a rest.

Therefore, even though he felt bad for them, Momonga thought of an excuse and said:

"...I have to do something in secret, and I will not allow anyone to follow me."

A brief silence followed.

Just as Momonga was starting to feel that it was dragging on, the maid finally replied:

"Understood. Then, please be safe, Momonga-sama."

Momonga's heart ached briefly as the maid ate it up hook, line and sinker, but he brushed it aside.

There should not be anything wrong with taking a short break and going outside to check out the surrounding scenery. Indeed, it was very important that he saw for himself whether they had indeed been transported to another world.

The excuses were welling up because Momonga was starting to feel that he had been too selfish.

Momonga waved away the guilt in his heart, and activated the Ring of Ainz Ooal Gown.

♦ ♦ ♦

His destination was a large hall. There were rows of narrow mortuary slabs on both sides of him, but there were no corpses on them now. The floor was polished limestone. Behind Momonga was a flight of stairs leading down, and at their end was a set of double doors, through which one could access the 1st Floor of the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick. The sconces in the walls had no torches; the only light came from the bluish-white moonlight streaming in from the outside.

This was the closest location to the surface that the RIng of Ainz Ooal Gown could take him, the central mausoleum on the surface of the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick.

All he needed to do was take a few steps to reach the outside world. But despite the vast space before him, Momonga could not take those steps.

That was because of the thoroughly unexpected encounter before him.

The silhouettes of heteromorphic beings loomed before him. There were three monsters in total.

One of them looked like a fearsome demon. Fangs protruded from its mouth and its body was covered in scales. It had stout arms and sharp claws, as well as flaming wings and a snake-like tail.

Another was a feminine-looking monster with a crow's head, dressed in a tight-fitting bondage outfit.

The final one wore full plate armor that was open at the chest, proudly revealing its abdominal muscles. If not for the black bat wings and the two horns protruding from its temples, it might have been mistaken for a beautiful young man. However, its eyes held a desire that knew no limit.

They were the Evil Lords of Wrath, Jealousy(Lust) and Greed, respectively.

All the Evil Lords turned their attention to Momonga, but they did not move, only watching with their unwavering gazes. The grim atmosphere weighed down on everyone present.

They were all monsters around Level 80 or so, and they should have been assigned to sentry duty around the Infernal Shrine where Demiurge lived, near the Gate to the 8th Floor. Shalltear's undead minions should have been stationed in the upper floors to stand guard. So what were Demiurge's subordinates, his elite guards, doing in here?

Behind them was one more figure. Momonga had not noticed him until now, but it had been watching Momonga from the beginning. Once he revealed himself, everything became clear.

"Demiurge…"

A surprised look appeared on the demon who had been addressed by name (Demiurge). That look seemed to be saying "why would his master be here", or "why would there be a mysterious monster here".

Momonga decided to place his bet on a slim possibility, and advanced. If he stopped now, it would be a miracle if his true identity was not uncovered. In any event, his plan was to slowly move forward while staying near the wall, ignoring the monsters and walking past them.

He was fully aware that their eyes were on him. However, Momonga suppressed his feelings of weakness with sheer willpower, held his chest high, and continued moving forward.

Once they had gotten close enough to each other, all the demons simultaneously genuflected, bowing their heads to him. The one at their head was, of course, Demiurge. His neat movements were slick and elegant, as though he were a nobleman.

“Momonga-sama. May I ask why you have come here, without your escort, and dressed like this?”

The cat was out of the bag.

Demiurge could be said to be the wisest being in The Great Tomb of Nazarick, so being seen through was inevitable. However, Momonga felt that the reason he had been seen through was because of the teleportation.

Only one person in Nazarick possessed the Ring of Ainz Ooal Gown that permitted its bearer to teleport freely through its halls — Momonga.

“Ah… it’s complicated. Demiurge, you should know why I am wearing this.”

Demiurge’s elegant face twisted in consternation. He took several breaths before answering:

“My deepest apologies for being unable to divine your fathomless intentions, Momonga-sama—”

“Call me Dark Warrior.”

“Pardon me, Dark Warrior-sama…?”

Demiurge seemed to have something to say, but Momonga tried his best to ignore it. Although it was a pretty embarrassing name, it made sense when one considered the names of other monsters in the game.

The reason behind having Demiurge address him by a different name was quite simple. Although only Demiurge and his vassals were here at the moment, this place was an exit, and many underlings would be passing through here. Momonga simply did not want them to call him “Momonga-sama, Momonga-sama” wherever he went.

How much did Demiurge understand without knowing Momonga's thoughts? Just then, a look of enlightenment filled Demiurge's face.

"I see… so that's what's going."

Eh? What's going on?

Momonga stopped himself from speaking the words in his heart.

As a mortal man, Momonga had no idea what conclusion that Demiurge, intelligent and cunning beyond measure, had come to after his ruminations. All he could do was hope that Demiurge realised his true intentions as his head was covered in nonexistent cold sweat under his helmet.

"I believe I have some grasp on your profound schemes, Mo… no, Dark Warrior-sama. Truly, they are considerations that only the ruler of this domain would have taken into account. However, I cannot allow your noble self to proceed unaccompanied. I am aware that it may inconvenience you, but I hope that in your boundless mercy, you will permit one of us to escort you."

"...It can't be helped. Very well, I will allow one person to travel with me."

Demiurge smiled elegantly.

"My deepest thanks for humoring my selfish request, Dark Warrior-sama."

"...Just call me Dark Warrior, you can dispense with the honorifics."

"How could I! To do so would be unforgivable. Of course, I can obey such an order while acting as a spy or performing special missions, but within the Great Tomb of Nazarick, how could anyone not show the due respect to you, Momonga-sama… no, Dark Warrior-sama!"

Demiurge's passionate monologue moved Momonga a little, and he could not help but nod in approval. He mused that being called Dark Warrior would lead people to mock him for having such a lame name, and he lamented picking that alias so casually.

“Forgive me for wasting your valuable time, Mo-Dark Warrior-sama. Then, you lot will wait here for orders, and explain to the others that I am on the move.”

“Understood, Demiurge-sama.”

“Well, it seems your subordinates approve as well. Then, Demiurge, let us be off.”

Momonga walked past the bowing Demiurge, who raised his head and followed his master.

♦ ♦ ♦

“Why was Mo… cough, why was Dark Warrior-sama dressed like that?”

“I don’t know, but there should be some reason for it.”

The remaining Evil Lords muttered to each other in confusion.

After all, they had not seen through Momonga’s disguise because he teleported here.

Momonga had no idea of knowing this, but the denizens of the Great Tomb of Nazarick, or rather, all of Ainz Ooal Gown’s servants radiated a certain aura that the servants could sense in order to determine whether a stranger was friend or foe. Within the guild, the aura of the 41 Supreme Beings that ruled Nazarick — now reduced to Momonga alone — was enough to tell them that the one before them was their absolute ruler. They could sense his mighty presence from a distance and they could not have mistaken Momonga for anyone else, even through his full plate armor. They would have seen through Momonga’s disguise immediately, regardless of how he arrived.

It was easy to differentiate his aura from the others in Nazarick.

The doors to the first floor swung wide, and someone climbed the stairs.

Judging by the aura that came from the stairs, the newcomer was a Guardian.

The Evil Lords saw the beautiful face of the Guardian Overseer, Albedo, rising from the steps. They went to one knee as they realised that they were in the presence of someone who was the equal of their master, Demiurge.

To Albedo, the vassals kneeling before her was merely natural, and she paid them no heed as she looked around.

Only after Albedo failed to find the person she was looking for did she turn back to the Evil Lords. She spoke without addressing anyone in particular:

"...I don't see Demiurge around. Where is he?"

"He… a Dark Warrior-sama passed through just now, so Demiurge-sama decided to accompany him outside."

"Dark Warrior...sama? I don't recall a name like that among the servants… Which servant did Demiurge accompany? A Floor Guardian following a lowly servant? How strange…"

The Evil Lords did not know how to respond, and looked at each other.

Albedo smiled gently to the Evil Lords:

"Could it be that mere servants like you dare to deceive me?"

Her tender, final warning made the Evil Lords shiver, and they realized that they could not keep hiding things from her.

"When Dark Warrior-sama came here, Demiurge-sama concluded that he was a person worthy of our respect."

"...Momonga-sama came here!"

Albedo's voice seemed to crack a little, and so the Evil Lords calmly replied:

"...His name was Dark Warrior-sama."

"...And his guards? Did Demiurge receive some notification from Momonga-sama? But I already arranged to meet him, so does this mean Demiurge did

not know Momonga-sama was coming? Ah, forget it, I need to change and bathe!"

Albedo touched her clothing.

Her clothes were dirty from her work. Her hair was tangled at the ends, as were her wings.

However, such petty imperfections could not begin to diminish the appeal of a world-class beauty like Albedo. It was insignificant, like the loss of a point or two out of a hundred million. However, to Albedo, even the slightest blemish on her appearance was a failure. She could not show this filthy self of hers to the man she loved so dearly.

"The nearest bath… the one at Shalltear's place?... But then she might get suspicious… although I'll just have to bear with it. You lot, go to my room and get my clothes! Quickly!"

Just then, one of the Evil Lords called out to Albedo, who was pacing around. She was the Demon General of Jealousy.

"...Albedo-sama, though this might be rude, would your present attire not be better?"

"...What do you mean?" Albedo angrily retorted as she stopped in her tracks. She thought the other woman wanted her to see Momonga in her unkempt state.

"...No, I simply meant that a beautiful woman like yourself would be best served by showing the signs of your hard work. In the end, you will still benefit, will you not, Albedo-sama?"

The other Evil Lords added their suggestions: "By the time you could bathe and prepare herself to meet Momonga-sama… Dark Warrior-sama, much time would have been wasted. It would be a shame to miss a good opportunity because of that."

"I see—" Albedo mused. They had a point.

“That makes sense… it seems I panicked because I have not seen Momonga-sama for such a long time. I can only meet Momonga-sama after 18 hours, don’t you think 18 hours is too long?”

“Yes, it is.”

“If only I could finish laying out the administrative framework and return to Momonga-sama’s side… then I’d better not waste time griping and find Momonga-sama. Where is Momonga-sama now?”

“He just stepped out.”

“I see.”

Although Albedo’s reply seemed curt, there was a distant smile on her face as she imagined being with Momonga, and she flapped her wings in an adorable way. She walked past the Evil Lords with hurried steps.

The footsteps suddenly halted, and Albedo asked the Evil Lords again:

“For the last time, do you really think Momonga-sama will approve of seeing me dirtied like this?”

♦ ♦ ♦

After leaving the mausoleum, Momonga was greeted by a beautiful sight. The surface area of the Great Tomb of Nazarick was 200 meters square, protected by six-meter thick walls, with an entrance and an exit at the front and back.

The Tomb’s grass was trimmed short and felt refreshing. On the other hand, the Tomb’s trees had leafy branches that shrouded much of the grounds in shade, and the extensive shadows gave the place a gloomy air. There were also alabaster tombstones scattered about.

The juxtaposition of the neat grass and the messy tombstones was quite incongruous. In addition, there were exquisite carvings of angels and goddesses all over the place, each of which was easily a work of art, but the chaotic tomb design was frustrating, to say the least.

Apart from the large central mausoleum, there were four smaller mausoleums in the north, south, east and west, each defended by statues of armored warriors, each six meters tall.

The central mausoleum was the gateway to the Great Tomb of Nazarick, and it was from this place that Momonga had emerged into the outside world.

Momonga stood at the top of the stairs and quietly surveyed the landscape before him.

The Great Tomb of Nazarick had originally been located in the icy world of Helheim, which was perpetually shrouded in darkness. The atmosphere was grim and dark, and the sky was constantly overcast. Yet, what he saw now was vastly different from that.

He was looking at a beautiful night sky.

Momonga looked to the heavens and he could not help but sigh. He shook his head, as though unable to believe his eyes.

"Amazing… to think they could include such detail in a virtual world… the air here is so fresh that it must never have been polluted. People born in this world wouldn't need artificial lungs to breathe…"

He had never seen such a clear night sky in his life.

Momonga wanted to cast a spell, but he was hampered by his armor. There was a certain mage class that allowed for the casting of spells in armor, but Momonga did not have that class. As a result, his full plate armor kept him from using magic. Even armor created by magic would not allow its wearer to cast spells while wearing it. Currently, there were only five spells he could use in his armored state, but sadly, the flight magic Momonga wanted to use was not part of them.

Momonga reached his hand into his pocket dimension and withdrew an item. It was a necklace with a pendant shaped like a bird's wing.

He put on the necklace and focused on it. The power buried within the necklace took effect.

“[Fly].”

Freed from the shackles of gravity, Momonga floated lightly into the sky. He rose upward in a straight line, gaining speed as he did.

Although Demiurge was frantically trying to catch up, Momonga paid him no heed and ascended steadily. Before he knew it, he was several hundred meters in the air.

Only then did Momonga’s body slow down. He forcefully cast aside his helmet, and said nothing — no, as he looked down at this world, he could not say anything.

The blue-white light of the moon and stars chased away the darkness of the land. The grasslands, ruffled by a gentle wind, seemed to be glowing. The countless stars and the moon gave off their own radiance as well, shining brilliantly against the light coming from the earth.

Momonga could not help but sigh:

“This is beautiful… no, beautiful would not begin to describe this… what would Blue Planet-san say if he were here?”

What would he do if he saw this world whose air, land and water had not been polluted?

Momonga recalled his comrade from the past, the man who had showed up for the guild’s offline meetings, whose stony face had broken out into a delicate smile when he was praised as a romantic — that gentle man who loved the night sky.

No, he loved nature, which had been polluted and almost completely destroyed. He played YGGDRASIL because he appreciated those scenes which no longer existed in reality. He had built the 6th Floor with his sweat, blood and tears. Its night sky was his personal design, and it was a reproduction of the idealized world in his heart.

That man who loved nature was always particularly excited when the topic came up. Some might even call it an obsession.

How excited would he be if he could see this world? How passionately would he declaim its glories in his baritone voice?

Momonga suddenly realized that he missed his old friend very dearly. Hoping to hear him expounding his wide knowledge again, he looked to the side.

There was nobody there. There could not be anybody there.

The somewhat hurt Momonga heard the flapping of wings, and the transformed Demiurge appeared before him.

This was Demiurge's half-demon form, with a pair of large black leathery wings growing from his back and the face of a frog.

Certain heteromorphic creatures had multiple forms. In Nazarick, Sebas and Albedo had other forms as well.

Although it was troublesome to train up levels in heteromorphic racial classes, they were very popular because they had different forms like final bosses in a game. In particular, people were fond of how these heteromorphic beings were weaker in their human and demihuman forms, but more powerful in their fully monstrous forms.

Momonga turned away from Demiurge, who was partially transformed into a demon, and looked to the sparkling stars in the sky once more. He spoke softly, as though to his absent friends:

"…To think one could see so far just by the light of the moon and the stars… it's hard to believe that this world is real. Blue Planet-san... this world is like a chest of jewels."

"Perhaps it is. I believe the beauty of this world exists to adorn you, Mo—Dark Warrior-san," Demiurge said in a reverent voice.

The sudden statement sounded like it was finding fault with his memories of his comrades, and it upset Momonga. However, the anger faded as he gazed upon the beautiful sight before him.

In addition, the act of overlooking this world, which seemed so tiny before him, made him feel that perhaps it was not a bad idea to play the role of an evil overlord.

"Indeed, it is beautiful. You say these stars exist to adorn me… perhaps that is so. Perhaps the reason that I have come here is to claim this chest of jewels which belongs to nobody else."

Momonga clenched his fist before him, and it looked as though he was taking the stars into his grasp. Of course, that was simply because his hand was covering the stars up. He shrugged at his childish behavior and said to Demiurge:

"...No, this is not something I can claim for myself. Perhaps these jewels are meant to adorn the Great Tomb of Nazarick; myself and my friends from Ainz Ooal Gown."

"...What a moving statement. If is your wish, then by your command, I shall lead Nazarick's forces to claim this chest of jewels. I, Demiurge would like nothing more than to present this chest of jewels to my lord and master, Momonga-sama."

Those cheesy lines made Momonga chuckle. He wondered if Demiurge had been intoxicated by the atmosphere as well.

"As long as we do not know anything about the beings which live in this world, I can only say that your idea is foolish. For all we know, we might be miniscule weaklings in this world. However, conquering this world might be quite interesting."

Conquering the world was something that only the villains in children's shows would say.

The fact was that conquering the world was not easy. And then there was the matter of ruling the world after conquering it, preventing insurgency and

maintaining public order, as well as all the other problems that came with ruling a host of nations. When one thought about these things, one would realise that there was hardly any point in conquering the world.

Momonga knew all of this, but he still spoke of conquering this world, because seeing its beauty awoke that juvenile desire within him. In addition, as he was getting into the mindset of being the leader of the dreaded guild Ainz Ooal Gown, those words accidentally fell from his mouth.

And there was one more reason.

"...Ulbert-san, Luci★Fer-san, Variable Talisman-san, Bellriver-san…"

It was because he remembered what his former guildmates had once said, "Let's conquer one of the worlds in YGGDRASIL."

He knew that Demiurge, the wisest mind in Nazarick, would understand that taking over the world was just a child's joke.

If Momonga had seen the smile that had spread across Demiurge's frog-face, he would surely not have left matters at that.

But Momonga did not look at Demiurge, instead turning his gaze to the horizon where the infinite expanse of the earth and sky met.

"…This is an unknown world. But am I the only one who made it here? Did the other members of the guild come here too?"

Although one could not play multiple characters in YGGDRASIL, his comrades who left might have made new characters on the last day of the game. Also, given that he had been online so close to the forced logoff time, Herohero-san might have come here too.

The fact was, Momonga's presence here was an anomaly. The unknown circumstances that had brought him here might have brought his comrades who no longer played the game here with him.

He could not contact them with a [Message], but there might be many reasons for that. They might be on a different continent, or something had changed in the spell's effect, and so on.

"...I see… then as long as the whole world knows the name of Ainz Ooal Gown…"

If his comrades were here, then the name of the guild would reach their ears. Once they found out, they would come over. Momonga was that confident in the strength of their friendship.

Deep in thought, Momonga looked over to Nazarick, and saw a curious sight.

A wave over a hundred meters across was moving along the land as though it were the sea. Little ripples rose from the surface of the plains, slowly heading in the same direction as they fused together, finally becoming small hillocks as they approached Nazarick.

The gigantic pile of dirt shattered against the sturdy walls of Nazarick, like waves crashing against the shore.

"...[Earth Surge]. He used his skills to enlarge the effective area, as well as his other class skills…" Momonga muttered in respect.

In all of Nazarick, only one person could use this magic.

"That's Mare for you. It seems camouflaging the walls is an easy task for him."

"Indeed. Mare has also recruited several golems and undead -- who are tireless -- to help. However, their progress is slow and hardly ideal. In addition, some gaps will be left after moving the earth, which will need to be filled with plants. That will only increase his workload further."

"...Concealing the walls of Nazarick was a time-consuming task to begin with. The only question is whether he will be discovered as he works. How is our perimeter security?"

“Our early-warning net has already been constructed. We will know of the intrusion of any intelligent beings within five kilometers, and we will be able to observe them without their knowledge.”

“Well done. However… this net is manned by the underlings, right?”

Demiurge replied in the positive, and Momonga suggested it might be good to erect another security net, just in case.

“...I have a plan for the security net. Put it into motion.”

“Understood. I will discuss this with Albedo and then combine her suggestions with your orders. Also, Dark Warrior-sama—”

“—It’s fine, Demiurge. You can call me Momonga.”

“Understood… may I ask about what you plan to do next, Momonga-sama?”

“Since Mare has carried out his task splendidly, I intend to check in on him. I also plan to give him a suitable reward in person…”

A smile appeared on Demiurge’s face. It was a gentle look that seemed completely out of place on a devil’s face.

“I believe your thanks will be the finest reward he can receive, Momonga-sama… my deepest apologies, I suddenly remembered something I have to do. As for Mare…”

“It’s fine. Go, Demiurge.”

“Thank you very much, Momonga-sama.”

As Demiurge spread his wings to fly off, Momonga aimed for a point on the ground and landed, donning his helmet along the way. The Dark Elf near Momonga’s destination seemed to notice his descent and looked up, surprise written all over his face as he saw Momonga.

Mare ran over with a *tatata* sound as Momonga landed upon the ground. The hem of Mare's skirt fluttered around his thighs as his legs pumped up and down.

For a moment, something peeked out from below, then vanished again… no, Momonga was not interested in looking under Mare's skirt. He was just curious about what he wore underneath it.

"Mo-Momonga-sama, w-welcome ."

"Mm… Mare, there is no need to be nervous. Take your time and go slowly. If you're not used to it, you can also dispense with the polite language… though only when we're in private, of course."

"I, I can't do that, how could I not speak respectfully to a Supreme Being… actually, Nee-chan shouldn't be doing that too. It, it's terribly rude…"

Although he disliked children being so formal around him, Momonga said:

"I see, Mare. Well, if you insist, then I am fine with it. However, I want you to know that I will not force you to do so."

"Y-yes! ...al-although, may I ask why you came here, Momonga-sama? Did I make a mistake…?"

"Of course not, Mare. In fact, I came here to praise you."

The expression on Mare's face went from fear that he might be scolded to surprise.

"Mare, your work is very important. Even with our security net in place, the inhabitants of this world may be over level 100. If we are faced with opponents like that, concealing the Great Tomb of Nazarick will be our top priority.."

Mare nodded furiously in agreement.

“Which is why, Mare, I wanted to let you know how satisfied I am that you have carried out your task. In addition, I want to tell you how relieved I am that you were the one handling this matter.”

One of the ironclad rules of society that Momonga believed in was that a good boss should compliment the good work of his subordinates.

The Guardians thought highly of him; conversely, in order to have them continue to be loyal to him, Momonga had to act in a way that was worthy of their praise.

Allowing these NPCs that his guild members had made together to feel disappointment or betrayal because of his actions would shatter his golden record as a guild master. It would be like a mark of failure branded on Momonga. Because of that, Momonga had to be careful to maintain the air of authority befitting a ruler when he spoke to the NPCs.

“...You understand what I’m thinking, don’t you, Mare?”

“Yes! Momonga-sama!”

Mare might have been dressed like a girl, but the fact that he was a boy was evident from his panicked face.

“Very good. Then, for your hard work, I shall give you a reward.”

“How, how could I accept such a thing? I was simply doing my duty!”

“...You deserve a reward for your good performance. It’s only natural.”

“It, it’s not like that! We exist to give our all for the Supreme Beings, so working hard is only to be expected!”

This back and forth went on for a while, and the two of them could not meet in the middle. Momonga decided to cut this sequence of events short.

“Then, how about this. In exchange for this reward, continue your loyal service to me. That should do it.”.

“Is, is that really alright?”

To cut him short, Momonga produced the reward in question — a ring.

“Mo-Momonga-sama… you’ve taken the wrong thing out!”

“No I—”

“—It can’t be right! That’s the Ring of Ainz Ooal Gown, a treasure which only the Supreme Beings possess! I can’t accept a reward like that.”

Momonga was shocked at how the unexpected reward was making Mare tremble.

He was correct in that this ring was intended for the guild members. Only 100 of them had been made, so that meant that there were only 59 rings without owners — no, 58. As a result, they were quite precious, but the reason for this gift was not just as a reward, but the hope that it would be put to good use.

In order to put Mare’s rampant imagination at ease, Momonga sternly said, “Calm down, Mare.”

“I, I can’t! How could I accept a valuable ring that only the Supreme Beings should possess—”

“—Calm down, Mare. Teleportation is blocked in the Great Tomb of Nazarick, and that generates all kinds of inconveniences.”

After hearing this, Mare slowly regained his composure.

“My hope is that during an enemy attack, the Guardians will command their respective Floors’ forces. At the same time it would be quite sad if a Guardian was unable to move around freely due to the teleportation block. Therefore, I give this ring to you.”

Momonga raised the ring on his finger high. It glittered brilliantly in the moonlight.

“Mare, I am pleased with your loyalty. At the same time, I understand your reluctance as an NPC to accept this ring which symbolizes us. However, if you truly understand my intentions, you will accept my orders and this ring with them.”

“But, but, why me… shouldn’t everyone else have gotten one too...?”

“I had intended to give the others these rings; however you are the first. This is because I am pleased with your work. If I gave this to someone who did no work, then this ring would have no meaning. Or do you intend to devalue this ring?”

“No, no, of course not!”

“Then take it, Mare. After accepting this ring, continue working hard for Nazarick and myself.”

Mare nervously reached out his hand and slowly accepted the ring.

Momonga felt somewhat guilty as he watched Mare. The truth was that he had an ulterior motive for giving him the ring.

That was because once Mare had the ring, it would be more difficult for people to tell that Momonga was teleporting around.

As Mare put on the Ring of Ainz Ooal Gown, it immediately changed its dimensions to fit Mare’s slender fingers. He could not help but stare at the ring on his finger, sighing in relief. Then he turned to Momonga and bowed deeply.

“Momonga-sama, th-thank you for this great gift... I promise that from today onward I will work harder so I do not disappoint you!”

“Then, I’ll trust you with it, Mare.”

“Yes!”

A determined look appeared on Mare’s face as he gave his immediate answer.

Why had Bukubukuchagama-san, who had designed Mare, dressed him like this?

Was it to dress him differently from Aura, or was there another reason?

Just as Momonga was pondering this question, Mare asked a question of his own.

“Ah, excuse me, Momonga-sama… but why are you dressed like that?”

“...Ah, about that…”

Because I wanted to get away — obviously he could not say that.

Mare’s eyes sparkled as he looked up to the troubled Momonga . How should he bluff his way through this? If he failed here, all the acting he had done to appear like a commanding superior would have gone to waste. No subordinate would respect a superior who was trying to flee.

Momonga desperately tried to calm himself down, and then help came from an unexpected quarter.

“That’s simple, Mare.”

Momonga looked back, and his eyes were instantly drawn to the person he was looking at.

A woman who seemed to be the embodiment of all feminine beauty stood beneath the moonlight. The bluish-white radiance played across her body, which sparkled in response. It was as though a goddess had descended from the heavens to grace the earth. Her black wings flapped, creating a gust of wind.

It was Albedo.

Although Demiurge was behind her, such was Albedo’s beauty that Momonga’s eyes did not even register Demiurge’s form.

“Momonga-sama wore this armor and concealed his identity because he did not wish to disturb the others at work.”

“When Momonga-sama approaches, it is only natural for everyone to stop whatever they are doing and bow to him. However, Momonga-sama did not wish to interrupt anyone. Thus he disguised himself as Dark Warrior-sama so the others would not cease in their labors to pay him his due respect. Am I correct, Momonga-sama?”

After hearing Albedo’s question, Momonga nodded repeatedly.

“As, as expected of you Albedo, you understood my true intentions.”

“It is only natural, as the Guardian Overseer. No, even if I were not the Guardian Overseer, I am confident that I could read your heart, Momonga-sama.”

As Albedo smiled and bowed deeply, there was a bizarre expression of Demiurge’s face as he stood behind her.

Although it weighed on his mind, he could not object to the people assisting him.

“So, so that’s why…” Mare said, with a look of realization on his face.

As he looked toward Mare, Momonga saw a sight he could hardly believe was real. Albedo’s eyes had suddenly gone wide open, to the point where it seemed like her eyeballs might fall out. She was pointing at Mare in a strange way.

Just as Momonga was thinking about this, Albedo’s face returned to its usual beautiful state, so quickly that Momonga thought it had all been an illusion.

“...What’s wrong?”

“Ah, no, nothing… alright, Mare, sorry for disturbing you. Take a break, and continue the camouflage work afterwards.”

“Y-yes! Then, Momonga-sama, I’ll be on my way.”

As Momonga nodded to him, Mare rubbed the ring on his finger and left.

“Speaking of which, why did you come here, Albedo?”

“I heard Demiurge say you would be here, so I wished to greet you, Momonga-sama. However, I apologize for making you see me in this filthy state.”

Momonga looked at Albedo again as he heard the words “filthy”. However, he did not feel that the words were fitting. Granted, there was dust on her clothes, but it did not lessen her beauty at all.

“Certainly not, Albedo. Your radiance could never be diminished by something as insignificant as dirt. That said, I feel a little uncomfortable about making a beautiful maiden like yourself run around. However, since this is an emergency, I must ask you to continue working for Nazarick for the time being. I apologize for that.”

“I can endure any hardship as long as it’s for your sake, Momonga-sama!”

“I am grateful for your loyalty. Ah, yes… Albedo, I have something to give you.”

“...What might that something be?”

As Albedo lowered her head and calmly replied, Momonga brought out a ring. Naturally, it was a Ring of Ainz of Ooal Gown.

“You will need this item in your position as the Guardian Overseer.”

“...Thank you very much.”

Her reaction was so different from Mare’s that Momonga was somewhat disappointed. However, he immediately realised that he was mistaken.

The corner of Albedo’s mouth was twitching and she was desperately trying not to let her expression change. Her wings were shuddering because she was trying her best not to spread them. The hand which took the ring had clenched up (when had she done that?) and then it opened up, trembling mightily. Even an idiot could see her excitement.

“Continue your loyal service, As for Demiurge… some other time.”

“I understand, Momonga-sama. I shall continue working hard in future to prove myself worthy of such a mighty ring.”

“Is that so. Then, I have abandoned the tasks that I must take care of. I’d best return to the 9th Floor before I get scolded.”

After seeing Albedo and Demiurge lower their heads in response, Momonga activated the teleportation effect of the Ring of Ainz Ooal Gown.

In the instant before the scenery changed, Momonga thought he heard a woman shouting “ALL RIGHT!” However, he felt he must have been mistaken, because there was no way Albedo could make such a crude sound.

Part 2

They were close to the outskirts of the village.

Enri heard the sound of clanking metal from behind her as she ran. It was a rhythmic sound.

She looked behind with a prayer in her heart — as expected, it was the worst-case scenario. A knight was chasing the Emmot sisters.

Just a little further.

Enri took a deep breath and forced herself to soldier on. She had no energy to waste on anything else.

Her breathing was rapid, her heart beating hard enough that she felt it would burst, and her legs were shaking mightily. Soon enough, she would be completely exhausted, and she would collapse and not get up.

If she were alone, perhaps she might have lost the strength to run and given up.

However, she was holding her little sister's hand. It gave her the energy to run away.

The truth was that the powerful desire to save her sister had kept Enri going until now.

As she ran, she glanced behind again.

The distance between herself and her pursuer had not changed. Even in armor, the man's speed had not decreased. This was the difference between a trained warrior and a village girl.

Sweat ran down Enri's back as her body went cold. If this kept up… she would not be able to escape with her sister.

—Let her go.

Those words echoed through her head.

—Perhaps you could escape by yourself.

—Do you want to die here?

—It might be safer if you split up.

"Shut up, shut up, shut up!"

Enri shouted at herself for those thoughts through her clenched teeth.

She was the worst sister imaginable.

Why was her little sister holding her tears back?

It was because she believed in her big sister. She believed her big sister would save her.

As she gripped the hand of her little sister — that hand which gave her the strength to flee and fight on — Enri steeled herself and hardened her resolve.

She would never abandon her sister.

“Ah!”

Enri’s young sister was as tired as Enri herself. Therefore, she suddenly stumbled, yelped, and almost fell.

The reason why the two of them did not fall was because they were holding tightly onto each other’s hands. However, Nemu’s near-fall caused Enri to falter herself.

“Faster!”

“Ah, yes!”

Although she wanted to run on, her little sister was starting to cramp up, and she could not move fast. Enri wanted to pick up Nemu and run, but the sounds of metal drawing up beside her filled Enri with fear.

The knight beside her held a bloodstained sword. In addition, his armor and helm were covered in traces of spattered blood.

Enri pushed Nemu behind herself and glared angrily at the knight.

“It’s pointless to struggle.”

There was no compassion in those words. Instead, there was only mockery. Those words said that running would only end in death anyway.

The anger in Enri’s heart boiled over, and she thought, *what was he saying*?

The knight raised his sword to Enri, who had stopped moving. However, just before he could swing it down on them—

“Don’t look down on me!”

“Guwaargh!”

—Enri forcefully punched the knight's metal helmet. That strike carried the anger that filled her and the desire to protect her little sister. She did not care that she was striking metal with her bare hand. She hit him with every ounce of her strength.

There was the sound of something like bones cracking, and soon pain spread throughout Enri's body. The knight wobbled under the force of the mighty blow.

"Hurry!"

"Yes!"

Enri bit back the pain and made to flee again — and suddenly a line of scorching heat bloomed on her back.

"—Ggk!"

"Damn you!"

The village girl punching the knight in the face had shamed him, hence his anger.

He was swinging his sword wildly, having lost his cool. As a result, his first blow did not cause a mortal wound. However, that was the end of her luck. Enri was hurt, and the knight was filled with rage. The next blow would certainly take her life.

Enri looked at the longsword raised high before her.

Panic was written all over her face as she watched the malevolent gleaming of the terrible swift sword, and she realized two things.

The first was that her life would be over in a few seconds. The second was that an ordinary village girl like herself had no way of fighting that fate.

The tip of the sword was stained with some of her blood. As her heart beat faster, the pain spread through her body, along with the scorching heat of her wound.

The pain she had never felt before filled her with fear and made her want to throw up.

Perhaps vomiting would clear the feeling of nausea that filled her.

However, Enri was looking for a way to live, so she had no time to throw up.

Although she wanted to abandon her struggle, there was a reason why Enri had not given up until now. That was the warmth pressed against her chest — her younger sister.

She had to let her sister live.

That sole thought kept Enri from giving in.

In contrast, the armored knight in front of her seemed to be mocking Enri's resolve.

The raised sword swung down.

Perhaps it was because all her energies were concentrated here, or because her brain was working overtime because she was on the verge of life and death, but Enri felt that time was passing very slowly, and she desperately tried to think of some way to save her little sister.

However, she could not think of anything. All she could do was use her own body as a shield, letting the blade cleave deeply into herself, in the hope of buying time for her little sister to escape.

As long as she had the strength, she would hang on tightly to the knight or the sword he stuck in her, holding on tight and not letting go until the flame of her life guttered out.

If she could do that. she would gladly accept her fate.

Enri smiled, as though she were a martyr.

As a big sister, this was all she could do for Nemu. The thought made Enri smile.

Could Nemu escape the hell that was Carne Village by herself?

Even if she fled into the forest, she might run into patrols of soldiers. However, as long as she could survive, there was a possibility of escape. In order to give her little sister the chance to survive, Enri would bet her life — no, she would bet everything.

That said, the idea of being hurt again frightened her, so she closed her eyes. In this world of darkness, she prepared herself for the pain that would come—

Part 3

Momonga sat on a chair and looked at the mirror before him. The roughly one-meter wide mirror did not reflect Momonga's face, but a patch of grass. The mirror was like a television set, showing images of a distant plain.

The grass of the plains swayed in the wind, proving it was not a still image.

As time passed, the sun slowly rose, its light banishing the darkness that covered the plains. This pastoral scene, almost poetic in its beauty, was a stark difference from the former location of the Great Tomb of Nazarick, the desolate world of Helheim.

Momonga reached out to the mirror and swiped his hand right. The mirror's image changed.

This was a Mirror of Remote Viewing.

This was a magic item used to display an image of a specific region. It was a very useful item for player-killers, or player-killer-killers. However, there were low-level spells which occluded information-gathering spells that could hide people from the mirror's eyes. In addition, it was easy for users to be counterattacked by offensive barriers, so it was an average item at best.

However, for the present circumstances, an item which could show the outside world was a very useful item indeed.

Momonga enjoyed the movie-like quality of the grass within the mirror as the image changed.

“It would seem that I can move the image with a wave of the hand. That way, I won’t have to keep looking at the same spot.”

The scenery and the angles with which it was viewed changed within the floating mirror. Although he had made several mistakes so far, Momonga kept changing his gestures to alter the landscape within the mirror, hoping that he would find someone. However, up till now, he had not found any intelligent beings — for instance, humans.

He repeated the same simple gestures over and over again, but all the images he got were the same: plains. Momonga was starting to get bored, so he looked at the other person in the room.

“What’s wrong, Momonga-sama? I stand ready to heed your every command.”

“No, there’s nothing, Sebas.”

Sebas was the other person in the room. He might have been smiling, but his words seemed to hold some kind of subtext. Although Sebas was absolutely loyal to him, he had objected to Momonga’s excursion to the surface without bringing his followers along.

Indeed, just after Momonga returned from the surface, Sebas had accosted and lectured him.

Momonga said what was on his heart.

“What will I do with him…”

Being with Sebas made Momonga think of his guildmate Touch Me. After all, Touch Me-san was the one who had designed Sebas.

Still, he didn’t have to make him so similar to himself. Even the way Sebas gets angry reminds me of him.

After grumbling in his heart, Momonga looked back to the mirror.

Momonga's plan was to teach Demiurge the hard-learned lessons of how to control the magic mirror. This was what Momonga had meant when he spoke to Demiurge about another security net.

Although it would have been simpler to leave this task to his subordinates, Momonga wanted to handle this task personally. The truth was that he wanted to use his can-do working attitude to inspire and gain the respect of his subordinates. Therefore he could not be seen to give up halfway. *Still, why can't I switch to a higher vantage point? If only there were a manual…* With these thoughts in mind, Momonga went about the painstaking work of figuring the mirror's controls out by boring, repetitive trial and error.

He did not know how long it had been.

It might have only been a while, but so far his work had not borne fruit, and he could not help but feel like this was all a waste of time.

Momonga casually waved his hand with a vacant expression, and his field of vision suddenly expanded.

"Oh!"

Surprise, delight, pride, Momonga's exclamation was filled with all of these. At his wits' end, he made a random gesture and the screen suddenly did as he wanted. This was a cry of joy one would expect out of a programmer who had pulled eight hours' worth of overtime.

Cheering and clapping answered him. The source of these two sounds was Sebas.

"Congratulations, Momonga-sama. Your servant Sebas stands in awe of your prowess."

Granted, this was the fruit of extensive trial and error, so you don't need to go that far. Momonga thought that, but when he saw that Sebas looked quite happy, he decided to humbly accept the butler's praise.

“Thank you, Sebas. Although I apologize for making you accompany me for so long.”

“What are you saying? Staying by your side and obeying your orders is the reason for a butler’s existence, Momonga-sama. There is no need to thank or apologize to me… although, it is true that this process took quite some time. Momonga-sama, would you like to take a break?”

“No, there is no need for that. Undead like myself are not affected by negative statuses like fatigue. If you’re tired, you may go and rest.”

“Thank you for your kindness, but it would be unthinkable for a butler to rest while his master worked. With the aid of magic items, I am not affected by fatigue either. Please allow me to stay by your side until the end, Momonga-sama.”

Momonga realised one thing from his conversations with the NPCs; namely, they casually used game terms in their speech. For instance, skills, job classes, items, levels, negative statuses, and so on. If he could use game terms with them in an unironic way, it might be easier to give them orders.

After agreeing to Sebas’ request, he continued studying the ways to control the mirror. Finally he discovered a method to adjust the height of his viewpoint.

Momonga smiled in satisfaction, and began looking for a populated area.

Finally, an image of something like a village appeared on the mirror.

It was located roughly ten kilometers south of Nazarick. There was a forest nearby, and wheat fields surrounded the city. It appeared to be a rustic farming village. By the looks of things, the village itself was not very developed.

As Momonga zoomed in on the village, he felt that something was amiss.

“...Are they holding a festival?”

People were running in and out of their houses this early in the morning. They looked panicked.

“No, that is not a festival.”

That steely voice came from Sebas, who was watching the display with a keen look in his eye as he stood beside Momonga.

There was an undercurrent of disgust in Sebas’ stern words. As Momonga enlarged the image, he too furrowed his nonexistent brows.

Fully armored knights were swinging their longswords at the villagers, who were dressed in rough clothes.

It was a massacre.

A villager fell with every swing of a knight’s sword. The villagers could not resist them, and could only run away. The knights pursued and killed the fleeing villagers. There were horses eating the grain in the field. Those horses must have belonged to the knights.

“Cheh!”

Momonga scoffed, intending to change the image. This village had no value to him. If he could extract more information from it, perhaps he might have a reason to save them. But as things stood, there was no reason to save this village.

He should abandon them.

Momonga was taken aback by how he could make such a heartless decision. A cruel slaughter was occurring before his eyes, but the only thing he could think of was the good of Nazarick. There was nothing like pity, anger or worry, basic human emotions anyone should have.

It felt like he was watching a TV show about animals and insects, where the strong ate the weak.

Could it be that as one of the undead, he no longer considered himself part of humanity?

No, how could that be?

Momonga struggle to find an excuse to justify his thinking.

He was not an agent of justice.

He was level 100, but like he had told Mare, this world's commoners might well be level 100 as well. Therefore, he could not tread blindly into this unknown world. Although it looked like the knights were conducting a one-sided slaughter of the villagers, there might be other reasons at work here which he did not know about. Reasons like "illness, "judgement", "setting an example", and others like them kept appearing in his mind. And if he stepped in and defeated the knights, he might earn the ire of the country they belonged to.

Momonga stretched out his bony hand and rubbed his skull as he thought. Could it be that after becoming an undead being who was immune to mind-affecting effects, he had become inured to scenes like this? Definitely not.

He waved his hand again, showing a scene from another part of the village.

It seemed like two knights were trying to pull a violently struggling villager off another knight. The man was pulled away, his arms were held, and he was rendered motionless where he stood. Before Momonga's eyes, the man was stabbed with a sword. The blade entered his body and exited from the other side of him. It should have been a fatal blow, but the longsword did not stop. One, two, three strikes — the knight seemed to be taking out his anger on the villager as he hacked at the man's body.

In the end, the knight kicked away the villager, who collapsed to the ground while spurting his blood into the air.

—The villager looked straight at Momonga. No, this might have just been a coincidence.

It was definitely a coincidence.

There was no way for anyone to detect the mirror's surveillance apart from anti-divination spells.

Frothy blood leaked from the villager's mouth as he tried to open his mouth. His eyes were unfocused, and Momonga could not tell where he was looking. Even so, with what may have been his dying breaths, he gasped his last words:

—Please save my daughter—

"What do you intend to do?"

Sebas seemed to have been waiting for this moment to speak.

There could only be one answer. Momonga replied coldly:

"Nothing. There is no reason, value or benefit in rescuing them."

"—Understood."

Momonga nonchalantly looked at Sebas — at the phantom image of his past guildmate.

"This… Touch Me-san…"

Just then, Momonga remembered something.

—Saving someone in trouble is common sense.

When Momonga had just started out in YGGDRASIL, hunting down characters of heteromorphic races was a common practice, and Momonga, who had chosen such a race, had been PKed countless times. Just when he was about to leave YGGDRASIL, those words, spoken by that man, had saved him.

If not for those words, Momonga would not be here.

Momonga sighed softly, and then he smiled. Now that he had recalled that memory, he had no choice but to go save them.

“I will repay that debt… besides, sooner or later, I’ll have to test my fighting strength in this world.”

After saying that to his absent friend, Momonga enlarged the view of the village until he saw everything. After that, he tried to pick out the surviving villagers.

“Sebas, put Nazarick on maximum alert. I will go first, and you will tell Albedo, who is standing by next door, to follow me after fully equipping herself. However, I forbid her to bring Ginnungagap. After that, prepare support units. Something might happen which results in my inability to retreat. Therefore the units sent to the village should be adept at stealth or have the ability to go invisible.”

“I understand, but I wish to request the task of defending your body to be given to me.”

“Then who will relay my orders? These knights are currently sacking the village, which means there might be knights near Nazarick who might attack us. Therefore, you must stay.”

The image changed, and now it showed a girl sending a knight flying with a punch. The girl was leading an even younger girl as they ran away. They were probably sisters. Momonga immediately opened his inventory and withdrew the Staff of Ainz Ooal Gown.

Just as the girl planned to flee, she was slashed in the back. Since time was tight, Momonga swiftly incanted the spell.

“[Gate].”

It had no limits on distance and a 0% chance of teleport mishaps.

The spell Momonga used was the most accurate and potent of such spells in YGGDRASIL.

The scene before him changed in an instant.

The fact that the opposition had not used teleport-blocking filled Momonga with relief. If he was denied the chance to rescue them, and was ambushed instead, it would have been bad.

The scene before the eyes was the same of what he had seen earlier.

Two terrified girls were in front of him.

The one who looked like the elder sister had a braid of straw-blonde hair that reached down to her breasts. Her skin, healthily tanned from working in the sun, was now deathly pale from fear, and her dark eyes were wet with tears.

The little sister — the younger girl — buried her face in her sister's waist, trembling in fright.

Momonga gazed coldly at the knight standing before the two girls.

Perhaps he was shocked by Momonga's sudden appearance, but the knight simply stared at Momonga, having apparently forgotten to swing the sword he was holding.

Momonga had grown up without knowing the touch of violence on his life. He did not think that the world in which he currently resided was a simulation, but the real thing, Even so, he did not feel the slightest bit of fear at the knight before him who held a sword.

This calmness allowed him to make a cold, cruel decision.

Momonga reached out an empty hand and cast his spell.

"[Grasp Heart]."

This spell was one that crushed a foe's heart, and among the ten tiers of spells, it was an instant death spell of the 9th tier. Many of the necromantic spells which Momonga was adept with possessed instant death properties, and this was one of them.

Momonga had chosen to open with this spell because even if it was resisted, the spell would still temporarily stun his opponent.

If the spell had been resisted, his plan was to take the two girls and jump back into the still open [Gate]. He had already planned his route of retreat since he was not sure what his opponents could do.

However, it would seem those preparations would not be necessary.

A feeling of something soft crushing beneath Momonga's fingers travelled up his arm, and the knight collapsed silently to the ground

Momonga looked down upon the fallen knight.

It would seem that even killing someone did not stir any emotions within him.

There was no guilt, fear or confusion in his heart, which was like the surface of a calm lake. Why was it like this?

"I see… so it's not just my body, but my mind that's no longer human."

Momonga took a step forward.

The elder sister squeaked in confusion as Momonga walked past her, probably in fear at the knight's demise.

Momonga had clearly come to rescue her. However, the girl was seemingly confused by Momonga's sudden appearance and actions. What was she thinking?

Although he had his doubts, Momonga did not have time to worry about them. After verifying the wounds on the elder sister's back through her tatty old clothes, Momonga put the girls behind him, and glared at a knight who had just emerged from a nearby house.

The knight saw Momonga as well, and took a step back in fear.

"...So, you dare to chase girls, but not someone who can fight back?"

As Momonga stared down the quivering knight, he considered what spell to use next.

Momonga's opening spell was one that he particularly favored, [Grasp Heart]. This sort of magic was Momonga's specialty. Momonga had used his innate skills to increase the chances of instant death, and his necromancy-enhancing abilities improved the effectiveness of [Grasp Heart] even further. However, it meant that he could not gauge the strength of that knight.

Therefore, he should use another spell against this knight, something that did not instantly kill him. This way, he could measure the strength of this world and verify his own power.

"—Since I've come all this way, I might as well run a few experiments. You shall be a test subject."

Momonga's necromancy spells were augmented, but the simple attack spells he used were not very destructive. In addition, since metal armor was weak against electrical effects in YGGDRASIL, most people enchanted their plate armor with electricity resistance. Therefore, Momonga deliberately chose to attack his foe with an electrical spell to see how much damage it would do.

Because his aim was not to kill his opposition, there was no need to enhance its effects with skills.

"[Dragon Lightning]."

A dragon-shaped bolt of white electricity crackled around Momonga's arms and shoulders. The bolt flared brightly as it instantly surged out at the knight Momonga was pointing at.

There was no way to avoid it or defend against it.

The knight who had been electrocuted by the dragon-shaped lightning bolt shone brilliantly for an instant. Miserable as his death was, it was still a beautiful sight.

The light in his eyes faded, and the knight collapsed to the ground like a puppet whose strings had been cut. The body beneath the armor was charred black and gave off a vile stench.

Momonga had been planning to follow up with another spell, but he felt silly as he noted the weakness of the knights.

“Pathetic… he died so easily…”

To Momonga, the 5th-tier [Dragon Lightning] was a weak spell. When hunting level 100 players, Momonga would usually cast spells of the 8th tier and higher. Magic of the 5th tier and below would almost never see use.

Now that he knew the knights were weak enough to be finished off by 5th-tier magic, Momonga’s tension vanished in an instant. Of course, it could be that these two knights were especially weak among their kind, but still, it was a great relief. Still, the plan to retreat with magic had not changed.

These knights might be focused on offense. In YGGDRASIL, a blow to the neck counted as a critical hit and dealt extra damage, but in the real world, it might well be fatal.

Instead of relaxing, Momonga raised his guard. It would be too foolish to die because he was careless. Next, he ought to continue testing his powers.

Momonga activated one of his skills.

“—[Create Mid-Tier Undead, Death Knight].”

This was one of Momonga’s skills, which could create various undead. The Death Knight in question was Momonga’s favorite undead monster, which he used as a meat shield.

It was roughly level 35, but although its attack power was only comparable to a level 25 monster, its defensive power was very good, equivalent to a level 40 monster. That said, monsters of that level were useless to Momonga for the most part.

However, the Death Knight had two very important skills.

One of them was the ability to draw away enemy attacks. The other was that just once, they could survive any attack with 1 HP. Momonga liked using Death Knights as shields because of these two skills.

This time round, he was also looking forward to using the Death Knight in a similar way.

In YGGDRASIL, when he used his skills to create undead, they would appear out of the sky in their summoner's vicinity. However, things seemed different in this world.

A cloud of black fog appeared. The cloud headed straight for the body of the knight whose heart had been crushed and then enveloped it.

The mist slowly expanded, and melded with the knight's body. After that, the knight wobbled before slowly rising to its feet like a zombie.

"Eeeeek!"

Momonga heard the shrieks from the sisters, but he had no time to worry about them. After all, he was quite surprised at the sight before his eyes.

With a wet, dripping sound, several rills of black ichor oozed out from between the gaps in the knight's helmet. It must have come from the knight's mouth.

The black fluid flowed out without end, until it covered the knight's entire body. It looked like a human being that had been swallowed by a slime. Completely surrounded by the black liquid, the knight's body began to twist and change.

After several seconds, the black liquid fell off the body of what was now a Death Knight.

It was now 2.3 meters tall, and its body was correspondingly bulkier. It no longer resembled a human being, but a wild beast.

In its left hand it held a large shield that covered three-quarters of its body — a tower shield, and in its right hand it held a wavy-bladed flamberge. This 130cm-long weapon was intended to be held with both hands, but the massive Death Knight could easily wield it with one hand. A dreadful red-black aura covered the flamberge's blade, which pulsed like a heart.

Its massive body was sheathed in a suit of full plate armor made from some black armor, and it was covered in red tracery that resembled blood vessels. The armor was also covered in spikes as far as anyone could see, and it looked like a man-shaped incarnation of brutality. Demonic horns sprang from its head, and one could see its rotted face underneath them. Twin points of hateful, murderous light shone in the eye sockets of its ghastly visage.

Its tattered black cape blowing in the wind, the Death Knight awaited Momonga's orders. The way it carried itself was truly deserving of the name "Death Knight".

Much like he had with the Primal Fire Elemental and Moonlight Wolves he had summoned, Momonga used the mental bond with his summoned monster and pointed to the corpse of the knight who had been slain by the [Dragon Lightning].

"Exterminate all the knights who are attacking this village."

"OOOOOOOAAAAHHHHHHH!" it roared.

So mighty was its cry that it shook the air, and it was so filled with bloodlust that everyone who heard it broke out in goosebumps.

The Death Knight ran, fast as lightning. The way it charged forward without hesitation was like a hunting hound that had scented its quarry. The undead hatred for the living made it sensitive to the prey that it would soon slaughter.

As the Death Knight's silhouette shrank into the distance, Momonga was keenly aware of a difference between this new world and YGGDRASIL.

That was "independence".

Originally, the Death Knight should have stayed by its summoner's side to await his orders and attack any enemies which approached. Yet, it had disregarded that order and launched an attack of its own accord. This difference might be a fatal vulnerability in an unknown situation like this one.

At a loss for words, Momonga scratched his head and sighed.

“It ran off… to think a shield would abandon the person it was supposed to protect. Then again, I did tell it to do so.”

Momonga reproached himself for his miscalculation.

Although he could make quite a few more Death Knights, it was best to conserve limited-use abilities while he was not sure of the enemy and the situation. Still, Momonga was a back-line mage. Without a front-liner to run interference for him, he was effectively naked.

Therefore, he would need to create another defender. This time, he would try making one without a corpse.

Just as Momonga was thinking about that, a humanoid shape came through the still-open Gate. At the same time, the Gate’s duration ended, and it slowly disappeared.

A person clad in a suit of full-body black plate armor stood before Momonga.

That suit of armor looked like a demon. It was covered in spikes and did not expose the slightest bit of flesh. Its clawed gauntlets grasped a black kite shield in one hand and a bardiche that radiated a sickly green glow in the other. A blood-red cape blew in the wind, while the doublet beneath was also the carmine of fresh blood.

“The preparations took some time. I apologize for my late arrival,” Albedo’s melodic voice spoke from beneath the horned helmet.

Albedo’s levels were in the defense-focused Dark Knight class. As a result, among the three level 100 warriors of Nazarick — Sebas, Cocytus and Albedo — Albedo possessed the greatest defensive ability.

In other words, she was the strongest shield in Nazarick.

“No, it’s fine. You came just in time.”

“Thank you. Then… how shall we dispose of these inferior lifeforms? If you do not wish to stain his hands with their blood, I will gladly eliminate them on your behalf, Momonga-sama.”

“...What exactly did Sebas tell you?”

Albedo did not respond.

“I see, you didn’t pay attention… my intention is to save this village. Our enemies are the knights in armor, like that corpse over there.”

Momonga saw that Albedo nodded in understanding, and turned his eyes elsewhere.

“Then…”

The two girls shrank under Momonga’s unyielding gaze, and tried their best to make themselves as small as possible. Perhaps it was because of the Death Knight, or because they heard its roar, or because they had heard Albedo’s words, which made them tremble uncontrollably.

Perhaps it was all of them.

Momonga felt that he should show his intention to help and reached his hand out to the elder sister, but the two girls seemed to have gotten the wrong impression.

The elder sister wet herself, followed by the younger sister.

“…”

The stench of ammonia filled the surrounding air. Fatigue washed over Momonga like a tide. He had no idea what to do, and Albedo was no help, so Momonga decided to continue trying to express his good intentions.

“...You seem to be hurt.”

As a working man, Momonga had long since trained up his ability to ignore things.

Momonga, who pretended not to notice, opened his inventory and withdrew a backpack from it. Although it was called an Infinite Backpack, it could only hold up to 500 kilos of items.

YGGDRASIL players commonly put their immediate-use items into this bag, because the items within the bag could be assigned to hotkeys in the game interface.

After digging through several of these Backpacks, he found a small phial containing a red potion.

It was a Minor Healing Potion.

This potion could restore 50 HP, and beginners in YGGDRASIL frequently used it. However, Momonga as he was now had no need for this item at all. This was because this potion healed through positive energy. To an undead being like Momonga, this potion was like a damaging poison. However, not every member in the guild was undead, so Momonga kept some of these items just in case.

“Drink it.”

“Momonga offered the red potion. The elder sister’s face was pale with fright as she replied:

“I, I’ll drink it! Just, please, spare my little sister—”

“Nee-chan!”

He watched the little sister weeping as she tried to stop her elder sister, while the elder sister apologized to her little sister while taking the potion. Their reactions confused Momonga.

After all, he had saved them in a tight spot, and had even offered them a potion. Why were they acting like this in front of him? What was going on here?

They don't trust me at all. Even though I wanted to leave them to their fate at first, I ended up being their saviour in the end. They should be crying and hugging me in gratitude. Isn't this sort of thing common in manga and movies? But the exact opposite is happening now.

Where did I go wrong? Could it be that being instantly accepted is a privilege of the beautiful?

Just as a baffled expression dawned on Momonga's fleshless face, a dulcet voice said:

"...Momonga-sama offered you a healing potion out of the kindness of his heart, but to think you would actually dare to refuse it… you inferior lifeforms deserve ten thousand deaths for that."

Albedo raised her bardiche in a natural way, preparing to behead them on the spot.

Considering they had treated him like this despite how he had risked himself to save them, Momonga could understand Albedo's feelings. However, if he let her go ahead and slay them, then there would be no point to this rescue.

"Wait, wait, don't be so hasty. There's a time and place for this, so lower your weapon."

"...Understood, Momonga-sama," Albedo replied gently as she withdrew her bardiche.

However, she was still radiating murderous intent, to the point where the two girls were gritting their teeth in fear. In response, Momonga's nonexistent stomach began cramping up.

In any case, he had to leave this place as soon as possible.

If he remained here, who knew what other tragedies might occur?

Momonga offered the potion again.

"This is a healing potion. It is harmless. Hurry up and drink it."

Momonga's words were gentle, but backed with an adamant will. There was also the implied threat that if she did not drink, she would be slain.

The elder sister's eyes went wide and she gulped the potion down. After that, a look of surprise filled her face.

"No way…"

She touched her back, then wiggled her body in disbelief and patted her back.

"The pain is gone?"

"Y-yes, it is..."

The elder sister nodded stiffly, to indicate that it did not hurt.

It would seem that the minor wounds on her were easily remedied by a low-tier healing potion.

Now that he had their trust, Momonga continued by asking a question. There was no way around that question, and depending on the answer, it would affect his future movements.

"Do you know of magic?'

"Yes, yes I do. The alchemist who comes by our village… my friend, knows how to use magic."

"...Is that so. Well, that makes things easy to explain. I am a magic caster."

Momonga then cast his spells:

"[Anti-Life Cocoon]."

"[Wall of Protection From Arrows]."

A dome of light, roughly three meters in radius, surrounded the sisters. The second spell was not visible to the naked eye, but there was a subtle change in

the air. He had originally planned to use an anti-magic spell as well, but he did not know what sort of magic existed in this world, so he did not do so for the time being. If the enemy had magic casters, then that was just their bad luck.

“I have cast a defensive spell that keeps living creatures from coming near you, as well as a spell that weakens the effectiveness of shooting attacks. As long as you stay here, you should be safe. Ah, just in case, I will give you these as well.”

After calmly explaining the effects of the magic to the two dumbfounded sisters, Momonga withdrew a pair of unremarkable-looking horns. Apparently, the magic did not obstruct them, since they sailed straight through the forcefield as Momonga tossed them to the sisters’ side.

“These are called the Horns of the Goblin General. If you blow them, Goblins — in other words, small monsters — will appear. Order them to protect you.”

In YGGDRASIL, electronic data crystals dropped from monsters could be slotted into almost any sort of item (apart from certain expendable items), in order to create just about any item a player could think of. In addition there were certain artifacts which could not be created by players and had fixed stats. These horns were examples of them.

Momonga had used the horn before, and at that time it managed to summon a Goblin Troop, 12 or so Goblins with some measure of ability. There were two Goblin Archers, one Goblin Mage, a Goblin Cleric, two Goblin Riders and their wolf mounts, as well as one Goblin Leader.

Although it was called a Goblin Troop, their numbers were few and they were very weak.

This was a trash item for Momonga. The surprise was why he had not disposed of it yet. Still, Momonga felt quite smart for being able to put this trash item to good use.

Another good point about this item was that the summoned Goblins would linger until they were killed instead of vanishing after a while. That could at least buy the girls some time.

As Momonga finished, he turned to leave, bringing Albedo with him as he headed to the village. However, after a few steps, a couple of voices called out to him.

“Ah… th-thank you for saving us!”

“Thank you!”

Those words stopped Momonga in his tracks, and when he turned around, he saw the two girls, their eyes brimming with tears as they thanked him. He simply replied:

“...Think nothing of it.”

“And, and this may be thick-skinned of us, but, but you are the only one we can count on. Please! Please save our parents!”

“Alright. If they’re still alive, I will rescue them.”

The sisters’ eyes went wide as they heard Momonga’s words. Their faces reflected the disbelief in their hearts, but soon they came to their senses and lowered their heads in thanks.

“Th-thank you! Thank you very much! And, and, may we know…”

The girl’s voice trailed off, and then she asked in a mumble:

“May we know your name...?”

Momonga almost responded by reflex, but in the end he did not state his name.

The name “Momonga” was that of the guild master of the former Ainz Ooal Gown. Then what should he call himself now? What was the name of the last man who remained in the Great Tomb of Nazarick?

—Ah, that’s it.

“...Remember my name well. I am Ainz Ooal Gown.”

Part 4

“OOOOOOOOOHHHHHHHHHHHH!”

The mighty roar shattered the air.

It was the signal for a slaughter to become a massacre of a different sort.

In the blink of an eye, the hunters had become the hunted.

Londes Di Gelanpo had probably cursed his gods more times in the past ten seconds than he had in the rest of his life. If the gods really did exist, then they should defeat that evil being right now. Londes was a faithful man — why had the gods abandoned him?

The gods did not exist.

In the past, he had looked down on those people who did not believe in the gods as fools. After all, if the gods did not exist, how could the priests work their magic? And now, he realised that he was the foolish one.

The monster before him — a Death Knight, for want of a better word — drew closer.

He took two steps back in response, trying to get away from it.

A shrill creaking noise came from his armor, and the sword he clutched in both hands was trembling uncontrollably. He was not the only one; the other 18 knights surrounding the Death Knight were all acting the same way.

Although they were filled with fear, none of them ran. This was not courage — the grinding of their teeth could attest to that. If they could, they would run as fast and as far as they could.

It was because they knew there was no escape.

Londes’ eyes shifted, pleading for help.

This square was at the center of the village, where Londes and his men had gathered 60 or so villagers. They looked fearfully at Londes and his men, while a group of children were hiding behind a wooden watchtower.

Some of the children held sticks, but none of them was in a fighting stance. It was all they could do not to drop their sticks.

During Londes' attack on the village, they had chased the villagers to the central square. They searched the houses, and then to root out anyone who was hiding in the cellars, they poured in alchemical oils and set them on fire.

There were four knights standing guard around the village with bows, and their job was to shoot down anyone who tried to escape the village. They had done this several times now, and it could be said that they were old hands at this sort of thing.

The massacre had taken a fair bit of time, but it had been successful, and they had gathered the surviving villagers into one place. After that, they would release some of the prisoners as bait.

It should have been like that, but—

Londes still remembered that moment.

The sight of Erion flying through the air, after the last few villagers fled into the square.

It should have been impossible. Nobody knew what was going on. How could they understand the reason why a trained, grown man in full plate armor — which still had some weight even if it was lightened by magic — could fly through the air like a ball?

After soaring about seven meters through the air, he fell to the earth with a thunderous crash and lay still.

A bone-chilling monster stood where Erion had been. The hair-raising undead being called a "Death Knight" lowered the tower shield that had bashed Erion and stood before them.
This was when their despair began.

“Aiiiiieee!”

Their panicked squeals echoed through the air. One of the men huddled together with his comrades could not bear the oppressive terror and fled with a scream.

Under these extreme circumstances, it was only natural that — when stretched to the breaking point — people would snap. However, among all of the fleeing man’s comrades, not one of them joined him. The reason was that would soon be evident.

A black gale whirled past the field of Londes’ vision.

The Death Knight’s body was larger than a normal human’s, but its nimble grace was far beyond anyone’s expectations.

The fleeing man only managed to take three steps.

Just as he was about to take his fourth step, an arc of silver brilliance cleaved his body in two. The bisected left and right halves of his body collapsed in opposite directions. A sour stench filled the air as his pink internal organs spilled out.

“GUWOOOOOOOOOOHHH!” the blood-covered Death Knight roared as it swung its sword.

It was a roar of joy.

Its look of delight was unmistakeable, even on its rotted face. As an overwhelmingly superior slaughterer, it savored the despair and terror of the pitiful humans who could not even survive a single one of its blows.

Nobody dared attack, though they had swords in hand.

At first, they had tried an attack, though they were afraid. But even those blades which had made it past their foe’s defense could not strike a telling blow through the Death Knight’s armor.

In contrast, the Death Knight did not use its sword, but sent Londes flying with a shield bash, and it did so without using enough force to kill.

It was clearly toying with them, from the way it did not use its full strength. It was plain to see that the Death Knight wanted to enjoy the dying struggles of these humans.

The Death Knight only dealt fatal blows in earnest when the knights tried to escape.

The first knight to run was Ririk. He was a nice guy but a bad drunk. His limbs were chopped off, followed by his head.

After seeing the two deaths, the other knights knew the score, so they did not dare to flee.

Their attacks were ineffective, and they would be killed if they tried to run.

The only thing they could do was wait their turn to be tortured to death.

Although there was no way to see their faces below the full helms they wore, everyone present was keenly aware of their fate. The wails of grown men reduced to children echoed throughout the village. These men who had always oppressed the weak had not thought that one day, they would be on the receiving end of that treatment.

“Oh god, please save me…”

“Oh god…”

After hearing these cries for salvation, the strength left Londes’ legs and he almost fell to his knees. He loudly cursed the gods — or was it a prayer to them?

“You, you lot, go hold that monster back!” a desperate knight shouted. He knew that his fate was sealed. His words sounded like an off-key psalm.

The man who spoke was standing next to the Death Knight. The way he was stumbling back on his tiptoes to back away from the corpse of his comrade was quite comical.

Londes frowned as he looked on that man in his pathetic state. It was hard to tell who had spoken those words because their closed helmets covered their faces and their voices were distorted by fear. Still, he knew that only one man would speak like that.

...Captain Belius.

Londes's frown deepened.

Overcome by his lewd desires, he had tried to rape a village girl and then sought help from others after he got into a fight with her father. After he was pulled off the other man, he vented his anger by stabbing the father with his sword. That was the kind of man he was. However, his family was quite wealthy in their country, and he had joined this unit because of his family's riches.

Everything had gone wrong because he had been made their leader.

"I'm not someone who should die here! All of you, hurry up and protect me! Be my shields!"

Nobody moved. He might have been appointed their leader, but he was not popular at all. Nobody would throw their lives away for a man like this.

However, the Death Knight responded to his shouting, and it slowly turned to face Belius.

"Aiiiiiieeeeee—!"

The only thing praiseworthy about him was that he could make so much noise while standing in front of the Death Knight.

Just as Londes began to respect this odd quality of Belius', he heard the man shriek in terror:

“Money, I’ll give you money! 200 gold pieces!! No, 500 gold pieces!!!”

Those were considerable amounts he was talking about. However, right now, it was like telling them that he would pay them to jump off a 500-meter cliff.

Although nobody responded, one person — no, half a person moved as though in reply to him.

“Ubooooooarrr…”

The right half of the bisected corpse gripped Belius’ ankles firmly. The bloody gargling from its mouth hardly sounded like words.

“—Ogyaaaaaahhhhh!!!!” Belius screamed in an unnaturally high-pitched voice. The onlooking knights and villagers were frozen in fear, their skin covered in goosebumps.

Squire Zombies.

In YGGDRASIL, creatures killed by the Death Knight would become undead of comparable power, haunting the place where they were killed. According to the game’s rules, those damned souls who fell to the Death Knight’s blade would become its slaves for all eternity.

Belius stopped screaming, and fell like a puppet whose strings had been cut, facing the sky. He must have passed out. The Death Knight drew closer to the defenseless man and stabbed its wavy-blade flamberge down.

Belius’ body twitched, and—

“Gu-guwaaaaaaargh!”

Woken by the incredible pain, Belius screamed: “Leh, leh me guh!!!!! Ah beggehg yeh!!!!!! Ah duh anythuh!!!!!!!”

Using both hands, Belius desperately grabbed the flamberge that had already penetrated his body, but the Death Knight paid his futile struggles no heed and worked the flamberge like a saw. His flesh and armor were cruelly torn open, and fresh blood flew everywhere.

“—Aah— eeeh— ah gib ya munni, leh, leh meh guh—”

Belius’ body shuddered, and then he breathed his last. Only then was the Death Knight satisfied, and it stepped away from Belius’ corpse.

“No… no… please, no…”

“Oh god!”

Their screams came from seeing the ghastly sight before them. If they ran, they would die swiftly, but if they stayed, they would die horribly. They knew that perfectly well, but still, they could not bring themselves to move.

“—Get a grip!”

Londes’ shout tore through their wailing. The world was filled with silence, as though time was standing still.

“—Fall back! Sound the horn for the horsemen and archers to come here! The rest of you, do your best to buy some time for the hornblower! I’d rather not die like that, if you don’t mind! Now move!”

Everyone moved in an instant.

There was no sign of their earlier panic. Everyone moved in silent unison, like a raging waterfall.

Their mechanical obedience to their orders without thinking created a miracle. There was no way they could move so immaculately again.

The knights each did what they were supposed to do. They had to protect the knight who would blow the horn and signal the others.

One of the soldiers who had taken several steps back lowered his sword and withdrew his horn from his bag.

“OOOOOOHHHHHHHHHHHHH!”

The Death Knight charged, as though reacting to the horn being taken out. Everyone was shocked. Could it be that the Death Knight wanted to destroy their means of escape so he could kill them to the last man?

The flood of darkness drew closer and closer, and everyone knew that stepping forward to try and stop it was certain death. However, the knights still climbed over each other to block the Death Knight one after the other. Their fear was wiped away by an even greater fear and they surged forward to become obstacles.

Every time its shield moved, a knight was smashed through the air.

Every time its blade flashed, a knight was cut in two.

“Dezun! Morett! Behead the fallen! Hurry, before they come back as monsters!”

The named knights hurriedly ran toward their murdered comrades.

The shield swung, and a knight was thrown into the air. His body was bisected by the flamberge.

Four men had lost their lives in the blink of an eye. Though Londes was still gripped with fear, he readied his sword against the coming of the jet-black storm, like a martyr preparing to give his life for his faith.

“Ohhhh!”

It might have been a meaningless gesture, but Londes did not intend to wait for death. Giving voice to a battlecry, he swung his sword with all his strength at the oncoming Death Knight.

Perhaps it was because of his circumstances, but Londes’ muscles broke their limit and surprised him. It might have been the best blow Londes had ever struck in his life.

The Death Knight swung its flamberge as well.

In an instant, the world before Londes spun—

And he saw his decapitated corpse collapse to the ground, as his sword swung through thin air.

Just then, at that moment, the horn rang out—

♦ ♦ ♦

Momonga — Ainz raised his head as the sound of the horn reached him from the direction of the village.

The area around him was covered with the corpses of the knights who had been standing guard here. The stink of blood hung heavy in the air, but Ainz paid it no heed as he ran his experiments. Just then, he chided himself for getting his priorities wrong.

Ainz cast down the sword in his hand. The sword which had originally belonged to a knight fell to the ground, its gleaming, razor-sharp edge now stained with dirt.

"...Well, I've said it before, but this physical damage reduction is quite something."

"Ainz Ooal Gown-sama."

"...Ainz will do, Albedo."

Ainz's request to be called by a truncated version of his name threw Albedo into confusion.

"Ku, kufu! Am, am I really allowed to do that? Would it not be disrespectful to shorten the name of the leader of the 41 Supreme Beings, especially if it is also the name of Nazarick's rulers!"

Ainz did not think that it was a big deal. However, her words meant that she respected the name of Ainz Ooal Gown, which pleased Ainz. Therefore, his reply was phrased in a gentle tone:

“It’s fine, Albedo. Until my former comrades arrive, that is my name. I permit you to shorten it.”
“I understand… no, but please let me address you with the appropriate respect. Then, then… my master, Ai-Ainz-sama… kukuku… yes, that’s right...”

Albedo twisted her body shyly.

However, since she was in full body armor, Ainz could not see her beautiful face. To him, she was just acting strangely.

“Could, could it be… kukuku… could it be that I’m the only one who’s allowed to address you in such a way?”

“No. Having someone address me by such a long name all the time would be annoying, so I would like to have everyone do the same thing.”

“...Is that so… ah, that’s right. Yes, that’s what I thought—”

Albedo’s mood turned gloomy all of a sudden. In an uneasy voice, Ainz asked:

“...Albedo, what do you think of the name I chose?”

“I think that name suits you very well. It fits my beloved — cough, cough — it fits you, in your capacity as the one who united the Supreme Beings.”
“...This name was intended to represent the 41 of us, and this includes your maker, Tabula Smaragdina-san. However, I ignored the feelings of your master and the others, and took that name for myself on a whim. How do you think they would feel about that?”

“...Although I fear to anger you… I pray you will allow me to speak. If my words displease you, then I will gladly take my own life if you command it. I feel that some of the Supreme Beings who abandoned us might object to that name being used by the one who stayed with us until now, Momonga-sama. However, they are not here, so if you wish to use that name, all I feel is happiness, Momonga-sama .”

Albedo lowered her head after she finished speaking, and Ainz remained silent.

The phrase “abandoned us” swirled in his mind like a vortex.

His past companions had left him for their own reasons. YGGDRASIL was just a game, and they could not abandon their real lives for a game. Momonga felt the same way too. Yet could it really be said that he — who had been fixated on Ainz Ooal Gown and the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick — had not been suppressing his anger toward his former comrades?

They abandoned me.

“...That might be so, but it might not be. Human emotions are a complicated matter, and there is no right answer. Raise your head, Albedo. I understand your feelings. All right, it’s decided… this shall be my name. Until my comrades object, I shall be Ainz Ooal Gown.”

“Understood. The thought that our most exalted master… and the man I love most would bear this glorious name fills me with joy.”

The man I love most… ah.

The uneasy Ainz decided not to worry about this for now.

“...Is that so. I’m glad to hear that.”

“Then, Ainz-sama, would you like to spend some time here? Although I would be happy to stand by Ainz-sama’s side, I… right, a stroll through the woods would be fine too.”

He could not do that. Ainz had come to save this village.

The parents that his sisters had asked him to save were already dead.

As he thought of their corpses, he scratched his head.

The sight of their bodies reminded him of a dead insect by the roadside. There was no pity, no sadness, no anger.

“Hm, well, a stroll might be all right. After all, there is nothing of importance to do. The Death Knight seems to be quite happy to do his job.”

“As expected of an undead being that Ainz-sama made. His marvellous execution of his duties is truly praiseworthy.

The undead made by Ainz’s magic and his skills were stronger than ordinary monsters of their kind due to Ainz’s class skills. Naturally the same applied to the Death Knight he had just created. However, it was only a level 35 monster, and it was nothing in comparison to the monsters which required XP to create, like Overlord Wiseman and Grim Reaper Thanatos.

The fact that it was still fighting until now meant that the enemies were weak.

In other words, there was no danger.

He wanted to jump for joy when he thought about it, but he had to okay the role of the dignified master, so Ainz quashed that thought. However, he clenched his fists tightly, under his robe.

“The enemies who attacked the village were too weak. Then, let us go check on the survivors.”

Before Momonga set out, he realised that he had some things to do first.

To begin with, he deactivated the special effects of the Staff of Ainz Ooal Gown. The malevolent aura which wreathed it vanished like a candle flame in the wind.

Next, he withdrew a full-face mask from his inventory. It was gaudily decorated, and its expression was hard to describe, being somewhere between crying and anger. It resembled a Balinese barong mask.

The mask looked creepy, but it had no special powers. It was a simple cosmetic item which did not contain a trace of data.

Only those who were logged onto YGGDRASIL for more than two hours, between 1900 to 2200 on Christmas Eve, would have this mask — no, as long as they were in the game during that period of time, they would automatically receive it. It could be called a cursed item.

This mask was known as the Mask of the Jealous, or the Jealous Mask.

Once, when he wore this mask, he was flooded by messages. “Has the company gone mad?” “We’ve been waiting for this.” “Nobody in our guild has it, can I PK him?” “I’m done with being a human being~” and other such things in a certain large message board.

Then, he took out a pair of gloves. Their rough exterior betrayed the fact that they were crudely made and had no special properties.

These gloves were called Jarngreipr, and they were an armor item made by one of Ainz Ooal Gown’s members for fun. Its only ability was to increase the wearer’s strength.

He used these items to hide his skeletal appearance.

Naturally, there was a reason for this emergency camouflage. It was because Ainz realised he had made a fatal mistake.

Ainz was used to YGGDRASIL, and looking like a skeleton did not frighten him. However, to the people of this world, Ainz’s appearance was synonymous with terror. Both the sisters who had nearly lost their lives and the fully-armored knights were afraid of him.

For the time being, he would use magic items to change his appearance from a “dreadful monster” to “evil magic caster”. That ought to reduce how frightening he appeared. Then he thought about the Staff. In the end, he decided to keep it with him. Besides, it was not a problem for him.

“Rather than beg your god for aid, you should not have massacred these people in the first place.”

With that line only an atheist could come up with, Ainz looked away from the corpse, whose fingers were folded into a gesture of prayer, and cast a spell.

“[Fly].”

Ainz floated lightly into the sky, Albedo soon followed him shortly afterwards.

“『Death Knight, if there are any surviving knights, leave them alive. They are useful to me.』”

The Death Knight sent its acknowledgement of Ainz’s will back through the mental link they shared. It was difficult to put the distant Death Knight’s thoughts into words.

Ainz flew toward the place from whence the horn blast had come, as quickly as he could. The wind lashed at his body, because he had never flown this fast before in YGGDRASIL. The robe plastered to his body felt a little uncomfortable, but that passed swiftly.

He soon reached the sky above the village, and Ainz looked down on the landscape beneath him.

Ainz discovered that part of the village square was darkened, as though it had absorbed water. There were many corpses and a few trembling knights, as well as the Death Knight.

Ainz counted the panting knights, who were too tired even to move. There were four of them in total. Though there were more than he expected, a few extra would not be a problem.

“Death Knight. That will be all for now.”

His words seemed strangely incongruous with the surroundings, like he were buying something at a store. But to Ainz, this situation was as casual as going shopping.

He slowly descended to the ground, accompanied by Albedo.

The false knights stared at Ainz with mouths agape. They had been hoping for a rescue, but what had come was the man responsible for everything, and his arrival shattered their hopes.

“Greetings, gentlemen. My name is Ainz Ooal Gown.”

Nobody answered.

“If you throw down your arms, I can guarantee your lives. Of course, if you would rather fight—”

One sword was cast to the ground. It was shortly followed by the other swords being thrown down until there were four blades on the ground.

Nobody spoke during this time.

“...You seem quite tired. Although, don’t you think your heads are held a bit too high before the master of the Death Knight?”

The knights immediately prostrated themselves before him without a single sound.

They did not look like vassals before their lord so much as convicts awaiting execution.

“...I will permit you to leave with your lives. In exchange, tell your master — your owner — this.”

Ainz used the effects of the [Fly] spell to move near one of the knights, and then he removed his helmet with the hand that was not holding the Staff of Ainz Ooal Gown. He noted the man’s exhausted eyes, and their gazes met through the mask.

“Do not make trouble around here. If you make a disturbance here, I will slay you with the rest of your country.”

The trembling knight nodded as hard as he could. His frantic gesture looked quite comical.

“Get lost. And make sure to relay this to your master.”

He jerked his chin, and the knights fled like rabbits.

“...Ah, this act is tiring,” Momonga quietly grumbled as he watched the knights run away.

If there were no villagers around, he might even have stretched his shoulders. Although he was doing the same thing in the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick, playing the role of a dignified person was very tiring for an average salaryman like Ainz. Yet, until the curtains closed on this act of his, he had to wear yet another mask.

Ainz resisted the urge to sigh and walked toward the villagers. Albedo followed behind him, her every step accompanied by the clanking of metal.

"『—Clear up your zombie slaves』," Ainz ordered the Death Knight.

As Ainz drew closer to them, he could more clearly see the confusion and unease on the villagers' faces.

It was not that they were not happy at being rescued from the knights, but frightened by the person before them.

Ainz finally realised this. He was powerful, much more so than those knights, so he did not consider this situation from a weak person's point of view.

He decided to reflect on this, and pondered it quietly.

If he went too close to them, the outcome would be the opposite of what he was hoping for. Therefore, Ainz decided to stop at a distance from them, and spoke in a kindly tone.

"You have been saved. Be at ease."

"You, you are…"

One of the villagers was saying that, but even in the middle of speaking to Ainz, his eyes never left the Death Knight.
"I saw someone attacking this village, so I came here to help."

"Ohh…"

As the noises spilled out, looks of relief dawned on the faces of the villagers. Even so, they could not be completely at ease.

What a pain. Should I try a different approach?

Ainz decided to handle this in a way he did not like much.

"...That said, this was not for free. I expect a reward commensurate with the number of villagers whom I saved."

The villagers looked at each other. It would seem that they were worried about money. However, their doubtful looks faded away. This crass demand for money in exchange for salvation seemed to have allayed their suspicions somewhat.

"With, with the village in its present state…"

Ainz raised his hand to silence the other man before continuing.

"We'll discuss that later. I rescued a pair of sisters before I came here. I will go bring them over now. Can you wait here for me?"

He had to make sure those sisters did not talk and give away his true identity.

Without waiting for them to reply, Ainz slowly headed off. At the same time, he thought about using magic to alter memories.

第四章 衝突

Overlord Volume 1

CHAPTER 4

CONFRONTATION

Part 1

The village chief had a house near the village square. Upon entering, one would be greeted by a large living room, with a kitchen off to one side. A rickety old table and several chairs occupied the center of the room.
Ainz surveyed the interior from where he was seated on one of the chairs.

The sunlight which shone through the windows illuminated every corner of the room, so he could see clearly inside even without darkvision.

He took a look at the woman in the corner of the kitchen, and the farming tools inside the house.

There were no manufactured products to be seen anywhere.

Just as Ainz thought that there would not be much in the way of technology here, Ainz realised that his thinking might be naive. Still, he was curious about what sort of science that a world with magic would develop.

Ainz shifted his hand across the old table to avoid the sunlight. His metal gauntlets were not heavy, but the shabbily-made table shook under its weight. The chair also creaked from Ainz sitting on it.

This was a textbook definition of the word “poverty”.

Ainz leaned the Staff on the table to keep it out of people’s way. The way the Staff reflected the sunlight in a brilliant display made the run-down old house appear to be some sort of fairytale wonderland. He recalled the surprised expressions on the villager’s faces, the way their eyes went wide and how they were lost for words.

A surge of pride came over Ainz as the villagers asked about the Staff which he and his guildmates had painstakingly crafted. However, his delight was immediately suppressed to normal levels, which made Ainz furrow his nonexistent brows.

Frankly speaking, Ainz disliked this forced calming effect. That said, it was also true that allowing his emotions to run wild would make it difficult to solve the challenges ahead of him. With that in mind, Ainz prepared himself for his upcoming task.

He had to negotiate payment for rescuing the village with the chief.

Of course, Ainz's real objective was to obtain information, and not money. However, directly asking for information would be strange.

While it would be fine in a small village like this, once the local lords found out, they would begin making their way to him. When they discovered that he knew nothing about this world, there was a high chance that they would try to use him.

Was he being too cautious about this?

Ainz felt that this was like running across a busy road — a fatal accident could happen at any time. The fatal accident in this case meant encountering the mighty beings of this world.

Strength and weakness were two sides of the same coin.

For now, Ainz was stronger than everyone he had encountered in this village. However, that did not guarantee that he was stronger than everyone in this world. In addition, Ainz was now undead, and from the terrified reaction of the two girls, he could imagine that undead were not very well-received in this world. He had to be aware that since most humans would hate him, they might well attack him. Thus, he had to tread very carefully.

"Sorry to keep you waiting."

—The chief sat opposite Ainz. His wife stood behind him.

His skin was dark and covered in wrinkles.

His body was very muscular, and it was obvious that those muscles had been honed through heavy labor. More than half of his hair was white.

Though his crudely made cotton shirt was stained by dirt, it did not stink.

The tired look on his face made Ainz think he was over 45 years old, but it was hard to tell, because he seemed to have grown older in the past half hour or so.

The chief's wife was roughly the same age as her husband.

She had been slim and beautiful once, but after long years of working on the farm, that beauty was nowhere to be seen. All that was left were the wrinkles that covered her face.

Her shoulder-length black hair was mussed up, and she looked gloomy even under the direct sunlight.

"Please, help yourself."

The village chief placed a crude-looking cup on the table. Albedo was not here because she was patrolling the village.

Ainz raised his hand, refusing the cup of hot, steaming water.

He did not feel thirsty, nor could he remove the mask. However, he felt that he should have refused earlier, given that she had gone to so much trouble for him.

The trouble in question concerned the boiled water.

First, there was the matter of creating sparks with a flint. Then, she had to light wood shavings — or tinder — with those sparks. Then, she had to fan the sparks into flames, and when they were big enough, she had to transfer them to the stove. Then, she had to boil the water, and by the time that was finished, a long time had passed.

This was the first time Ainz had seen water boiled by a hand-started fire, rather than through the use of an electric kettle. He found it quite interesting. Back in his world, he had boiled water on a gas stove, so it was hardly as time-consuming as this.

This was also a good opportunity to gather some information on the technological level of this world. With that in mind, Ainz spoke to the chief again:

"I do apologize, especially since you went to all this trouble to prepare water for me."

"You are too kind. There is no need to apologize."

The fact that Ainz lowered his head to them (however slightly) filled the village chief and his wife with dread. They could not imagine the Death Knight's summoner bowing his head to anyone.

However, it was hardly strange to Ainz. It was always a good idea to have a friendly attitude when negotiating with someone else.

Of course, he could simply have used [Charm Person] to make them talk, followed by high-tier memory alteration spells, much like he had done with the sisters. However, that was a last resort, because it took far too much MP.

Ainz recalled the feeling of spending MP; it felt like a strange fatigue, like he had lost something.

Just altering the tens of seconds of their memories — until he had put on his mask and his gauntlets — had taken a considerable amount of MP.

"Then, let us cut to the chase and begin the negotiations."

"Yes. But before that… thank you very much!"

The chief bowed to Ainz, his head so low that it nearly touched the table. After that, his wife bowed as well.
"Without your help, we would all be dead by now. You have our deepest thanks!"

Ainz was quite surprised to receive such unreserved gratitude.

When he looked back on his past life, he had never been thanked like this before. No, the sisters he rescued earlier had acted that way too. Well, had never rescued someone before, so he thought that their reaction was only natural.

That was a relic from his time as a human being — as Suzuki Satoru. Although he was somewhat embarrassed by this earnest appreciation, he certainly did not dislike it.

“Please, raise your heads. Like I said earlier, I did not help you for free.”

“We know that, but still, we wish to thank you for rescuing us and many of the other villagers.”

“...Then, paying me more will be good enough. Come, let us discuss it. You must have many things to do, village chief-dono.”

“Nothing could be more important than spending time with our savior, but I understand.”

The chief slowly raised his head, and Ainz racked his nonexistent brains.

His goal here was to obtain information through conversation, rather than through magic.

—What a pain.

He still remembered the tricks he had used as an office worker. How effective would they be here? Hopefully, at least half of them would be useful. After steeling himself against the possibility of failure, Ainz asked:

“...Let us get to the point. How much can you pay me?”

“We would not dare deceive our savior. I do not know how many silver and copper pieces we can gather if we do not collect them from everyone, but I believe we can muster up at least 3000 copper pieces.”

I have no idea what that means, Ainz thought.

Asking them directly was a mistake. I should have tried a different approach. Besides, I was a lousy worker to begin with, and my job skills were pretty bad.

It sounded like a large amount, but without knowing the value of money, he could not tell if it was an appropriate sum or not. He had to avoid accepting too high or too low a sum, lest he reveal his ignorance.

No, he should have been relieved that they did not offer him "four heads of cattle" or something.

Just as he was about to sink into depression, his mental state immediately settled down. Ainz silently praised his undead body, and then he realized one more thing.

First, copper and silver pieces were the basic units of currency in this village. Second, there should be other forms of currency which were more or less valuable, but he was not confident that he could draw this information out of them.

He needed to learn the monetary value of these copper pieces. Without that knowledge, things would be troublesome in the future. However, not knowing the value of money was quite suspicious, and he wanted to keep a low profile while he learned more about this world.

That was why he was thinking as hard as he could to avoid making a bigger mistake.

"These small coins are hard to carry in large amounts. I'd like something in a bigger denomination, if you can manage it."

"Our sincerest apologies. If we could pay in gold pieces, we would. However… the fact is that our village does not use gold pieces…"

Ainz fought back the urge to sigh in relief.

The chief's answer went in the direction that he was hoping for. Therefore, Momonga thought heavily about how he would continue steering the conversation, until it seemed like smoke would start coming out of his head.

"How about this: I plan to buy the produce of this village for a reasonable price, so all you need to do is pay me in currency used for trading."

Ainz secretly opened his inventory under his robe, and withdrew a pair of gold coins from YGGDRASIL. One of the coins was decorated by the face of a woman, while the other coin had the face of a man. The former was a coin from after the huge update "Valkyrie's Downfall", while the latter was a coin from before the update.

Their values were the same, but they meant different things to Ainz.

The old coin was one that had followed Ainz ever since he had started playing YGGDRASIL until he had formed the guild Ainz Ooal Gown. The new coins had been released with the update, when Ainz Ooal Gown had been in its golden age. His equipment was almost complete at that point, so those coins simply went into his inventory's coffers.

Ever since he had started out as a skeleton mage, he used his spells to defeat monsters roaming the world and gained gold coins which floated in the air. He soloed dungeons, defeated the vicious monsters within, and earned a huge pile of gold with great effort. After the members of Ainz Ooal Gown completed a dungeon, they sold the data crystals they collected and in exchange, they received these gold pieces, which glowed so brightly...

But Ainz waved that topic aside.

He put the old coin away, and held up the new coin.

"...If I used this gold piece to buy something, what could I get for it?"

He placed the gold coin on the table. As one, the village chief and his wife stared, their eyes wide.

"This, this is!"

“This is currency used in a land far, far away. Can it be used here?”

“I should think so… please wait a little.”

Relief came over Ainz as he heard that the coin could be used. Then, he watched as the chief left his seat, went to his room, and came back with something he had once seen during his history lessons.

That object was called a balance scale.

After that, it was his wife’s turn. She took the gold coin and put it next to a circular object, as though she were comparing their sizes. After she was satisfied, she placed the gold coin on one pan of the balance, and on the other pan went a counterweight.

He seemed to recall that this sort of thing was called a “standardized mass”.

As Ainz went through his memories, he compared them to the wife’s actions and tried to figure out what she was trying to do. The first part should have been comparing his coin to the gold pieces of this country, and next she was trying to confirm its gold content.

It would seem the gold coin was heavier, and the standardized mass rose up. The chief’s wife put another mass on it, and both sides balanced out.

“It seems to be about twice as heavy as a regular gold piece… perhaps, perhaps if we could scratch the surface…”

“O-oi! You’re being rude! Please accept my sincerest apologies on behalf of my wife, for saying such foolish things…”

No wonder. She must have thought it was gold-plated. Ainz was not completely unoffended, but he was not angry.

“It’s fine… although, if you scratch it and find that it’s pure gold, you’ll take it, no?”

“Ah, no… we are truly sorry for this.”

The chief's wife bowed in apology, and returned the gold coin.

"Think nothing of it. After all, it's only sensible to verify the bona fides of any money you're given. Still, what do you think of this gold piece? Don't you think it looks like a work of art?'

"Indeed, it is very beautiful. May I ask the name of the country from which it came?"

"It's no longer — yes, that country no longer exists."

"I see…"

"...Well, you've confirmed for yourselves that it weighs twice as much as a regular gold piece, but considering its artistic value, this gold piece should be worth more as a result. What do you think?"

"That may be so… but we are not merchants, and we do not know the value of art…"

"Hahaha… well, that's not wrong. So, if I were to use this to buy something, it would be worth two normal gold pieces?"

"Of, of course."

"Actually, I have a few more gold pieces like this. What can you sell me for them? Of course, I wish to pay the usual market rate for them. I don't mind if it's the same as what a street vendor would charge. By all means, go ahead and inspect these coins. Please—"

"Ainz Ooal Gown-sama!"

The village chief's sudden shout made Ainz's nonexistent heart lurch. The chief's determined expression seemed harder and more forceful than before.

"...Ainz will do."

"Ainz-sama, then?" The chief seemed a little surprised at this, but he soon nodded and continued speaking:

“I fully understand what you want to say, Ainz-sama.”

For a moment, Ainz wondered if a giant question mark icon had appeared over his head. There seemed to be a misunderstanding of some sort, but he had no idea what the chief was getting at, so he did not know how to answer him.

“I am very aware that you does not wish to be seen as cheap, and I understand that you would wish to request an appropriate reward in keeping with the public view of yourself, Ainz-sama. Certainly, it would require a great deal of money to obtain your services. Therefore, what else do you desire besides 3000 coppers?”

Ainz had no idea what the chief was talking about and his mind was a whirl of confusion. He was silently grateful that he was wearing a mask. The reason Ainz brought out the gold coin was because he wanted to know what it could buy, and thus gain a rough grasp of market values. How had things ended up like this?

The chief did not give Ainz any opportunity to cut in and continued:

“However, as I said earlier, this village can only produce 3000 copper coins in cash. Although you must be suspicious of us, we would not dare hide the truth from our savior, Ainz-sama.”

The chief’s expression seemed honest and determined. He did not seem to be lying. If it turned out to be a deception, then Ainz could only curse his inability to read people.

“No, I am certain that a great man like yourself could not possibly be content with that sum. Perhaps if everyone in the village gathered their wealth, we might be able to produce sufficient cash to satisfy Ainz-sama. However… our village has lost a lot of manpower, and if we paid more than 3000 coppers, we would not be able to survive the coming winter. The same applies with our produce. Many fields will have to be abandoned because we lack the people to work them. If we gave you our supplies, our lives would be very difficult. Although it pains me to have to ask a favor of our savior, perhaps… could we… could we pay by instalments?”

Hm? Isn't this a good chance?

It felt like he had been lost in a dense forest, and then his field of view suddenly expanded before him. Ainz pretended to think about it, and then all he could do was pray it all worked out. After a few seconds, Ainz finally gave his reply.

"I understand. The payment will not be needed."

"Eh?! But… but why?"

The village chief and his wife stared at Ainz, their eyes wide and their tongues tied. Ainz raised his hand, indicating that he still had something to say. He had to consider what he could and could not reveal, and it was quite troublesome. He did not know if he could guide them into telling him what he wanted, but he had no choice but to try.
"…I am a magic caster. I was researching spells in a place called Nazarick, and I have only stepped outside recently."

"I see, so that is why you are dressed like this."

"Ah, mm. That's right," Ainz muttered as he touched the Jealous Mask.

What would people on the street think if they saw a magic caster walking around in his weird getup?

He thought of the crowded streets of Bali, and just as he was hoping not to see something like that in his world, Ainz noticed something that he could not understand, which was how YGGDRASIL terms were understood and used here.

The term "magic caster" referred to a lot of things. It included clerics, priests, druids, arcaners, sorcerers, wizards, bards, mikos, talismancers, sages and countless other magic-using classes. In YGGDRASIL, they were all called magic casters. It would be surprising if the exact terminology carried over to this world.

As Ainz watched their reaction, he replied:

"...I may have said that I did not want a reward, but a magic caster uses many tools to achieve his aims, including fear and knowledge. These things are all tools for generating profit, but like I said earlier, I was focused on spell research, so my knowledge of local matters is somewhat lacking. Therefore, I would like to learn about the surroundings from the two of you. In addition, I hope you will not tell anyone about this sale of information. I will accept that in lieu of a reward."

Nobody would be so nice as to say "I don't want anything". One could say that nothing was more expensive than being free of charge.

Someone who saved another's life was entitled to a reward for their hard work. Yet, if the savior said they did not want a reward, anyone would find that strange.

Then, the next best thing was to make the other side feel that they had paid in some way, even if it was in an intangible form.

In other words, the best solution to the present situation was to allay their suspicions by having them trade information to Ainz. That would put them at ease.

The chief and his wife nodded, steadfast looks on their faces.

"I understand. We will not let anyone know about this."

Ainz secretly clenched his fist in approval. It would seem the skills he had picked up through working could still be put to use here.

"Excellent. I do not wish to bind you with magic. I shall trust your good nature."

Ainz extended an armored hand. The chief stared blankly at it for a moment before taking the situation in, and he grasped Ainz's hand.

After that, Ainz breathed a sigh of relief. It would seem shaking hands was a known practice here. It would have been tremendously depressing if the chief had looked dumbfoundedly at him.

Of course, Ainz did not fully trust them. After all, mouths that were sealed by the promise of benefits could be opened by bigger benefits. If he tried to play on their personalities to keep them quiet, the vagaries of human nature might make them talk. No method was better than the other, so all Ainz could do was take a chance and hope that the chief's character would not let him reveal the secret. Although, it would be fine even if he did. That betrayal would simply be more leverage Ainz could use in future dealings with the village.

However, Ainz's instincts told him that they would not betray him. After seeing the earnest gratitude of the chief and his wife, he believed that they would be loyal.

"Then… can you tell me more about this place?"

♦ ♦ ♦

"...What, what is this?"

"Urk! Is something the matter?"

"No, it's fine. I was simply speaking to myself. Forgive me for alarming you."

Ainz recovered in an instant and immediately covered himself up. If his body were still human, he would be sweating buckets by now.

The chief simply said, "Is that so" and did not ask further.

Perhaps the chief had already equated "magic casters" with "weirdos". Then again, that was better for Ainz...

"Shall I prepare a drink for you?"

"Oh, no, I'm not thirsty. Please, don't trouble yourself."

His wife was no longer in the room, but outside — there were many things she had to help with. Only Ainz and the chief were in the house now.

Ainz first asked about the neighboring countries, and the chief responded with many names that he had never heard before. Although Ainz was prepared for this, he could not help but be surprised after hearing them.

At first, Ainz had thought that this world would be designed according to the fundamental principles of YGGDRASIL. After all, he could use YGGDRASIL's magic here, and there were many connections with YGGDRASIL to. Yet, none of the names he heard were related to YGGDRASIL.

The nearby countries were the Re-Estize Kingdom, the Baharuth Empire and the Slaine Theocracy. These names did not appear in the context of YGGDRASIL, which was inspired by Norse mythology.

Ainz felt like the world was spinning and his body was wobbling. Ainz gripped the table edge with a gauntleted hand to maintain his balance. Although he had expected this world to be an alien one, he could not help but be surprised by it.

The impact was greater than he had expected.

This was the first time he had felt so shaken ever since he had become undead.

Ainz tried his best to remain calm, and reconsidered what he had heard about those neighboring kingdoms and the local geography.

Firstly, there was the Re-Estize Kingdom and the Baharuth Empire. These countries were on different sides of a mountain range, and to the south of those mountains was a sprawling forest, and at the edge of that forest was this village, under the Re-Estize Kingdom, and the fortress city of E-Rantel.

Relations between the Kingdom and the Empire were bad, and they would fight a battle in the wilderness near E-Rantel almost every year.

To the south was the Slaine Theocracy.

The best way to describe the orientation of these countries was to draw a circle, and then divide it up with an inverted T. It seemed confusing, but it was much easier to describe things that way. To the left was the Re-Estize Kingdom, to the right was the Baharuth Empire, and below them was the

Slaine Theocracy. There were other countries, but the chief only knew of these three.

The chief was not sure where exactly this village was placed between the three of them.

In other words —

"...How foolish of me."

The knights from just now were wearing armor emblazoned with the insignia of the Baharuth Empire, so the chief believed that they were from the Baharuth Empire. But this area also bordered the Slaine Theocracy, so they might have been knights from that country in disguise.

Releasing them all was a mistake. He should have kept one for questioning, but it was too late for that now.

If this was the work of the Slaine Theocracy, then he should probably do something on the Empire's side. On the Kingdom's side, he should have accumulated enough goodwill with them for rescuing their village, so things should be fine for now.

Ainz sank into thought.

Was he the only one who had come to this world?

Impossible. There was a very high chance other players had come here too. Perhaps Herohero-san was here as well. He needed to think about what would happen if he encountered other players.

If other players had come to this world, they would probably gather up, given the nature of Japanese people. When the time came, he had to do almost anything to blend in. He could give in to anything as long as it did not involve Ainz Ooal Gown.

The problem was what would happen if the other side considered him an obstacle. The possibility was slight, but it could not be discounted.

Ainz Ooal Gown was a guild that had always roleplayed as villains through PKing, and thus they were a much-hated guild. He could not be sure that he had shed that negative image. For all he knew, the other players might want to take revenge on him out of a sense of justice and righteous anger.

In order to avoid others declaring a vendetta on him, he had to refrain from doing anything that antagonized the surrounding people. For instance, massacring the local populace — especially innocent civilians — might enrage those players who had not yet lost their humanity. Of course, it would be a different matter if there was a reason which would satisfy them, such as killing the knights who were trying to sack this village.

In any event, it would be better if future actions were taken for a high-sounding reason. That also meant he might have to do things he did not like, but that could not be helped.

If the people he met bore hatred toward Ainz Ooal Gown, then combat would be unavoidable. To that end, he had to draw up a plan and countermeasures if that situation took place.

Given the current strength of the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick's defenses, they could easily overwhelm about 30 level 100 players. In addition, they could use World-Class Items in their defense, so it was a nigh-impregnable fortress. They would probably be able to repel invaders like they had in the past.

However, it was easy to see how dire the situation could be without reinforcements. In addition, the trump card of Ainz Ooal Gown — their World-Class Items — would drain Ainz's levels every time he unleashed their full power. If they were attacked in succession, the time might come when the World-Class Items would become unusable.

Ainz was very clear that wargaming a scenario like this in his head was prone to bias and tunnel vision. However, Ainz was no longer a child, and he always considered the worst-case scenario before taking any action. This was simply thinking of how to take care of a problem before it happened.

If he just wanted to scrape by, he could simply live in the mountains like a beast. However, the power he possessed and the mighty name he bore prevented him from doing that.

If he wanted was to coexist peacefully with the world, then he would need to deal with problems as and when they came up.

As such, combat and the expansion of fighting power would become a very important topic in future. He had to gather information about this world, as well as news about other players.

"...That should do."

"What happened?"

"No, it's nothing. I simply spaced out because things were not as I expected. Right, can you tell me about something else now?"

"Ah, ah yes, I understand."

The village chief started talking about monsters next.

Much like YGGDRASIL, this world had monsters in it. The nearby forest was filled with monsters, and one of them was known as the "Wise King of the Forest". There were also Dwarves, all sorts of Elves, Goblins, Orcs, Ogres, and the like. Apparently some of the demihumans had even built their own nation.

There were people called adventurers who drove off these monsters, and they counted many magic casters among their number. Apparently, these adventurers had guilds of their own in all the big cities.

Apart from that, he also learned about the nearby fortress city of E-Rantel.

According to the chief, E-Rantel was the biggest city in the area, although he did not know exactly how large its population was. That seemed to be the best place to gather information.

While the chief's words were helpful, there were still many unclear details. Therefore, it would be better to send someone over there to find out, rather than ask the chief questions.

Finally, there was the matter of language. It was truly surprising that they understood Japanese in this new world. As a result, Ainz looked carefully at the village chief's mouth, and discovered that he was not, in fact, speaking Japanese. Neither their words of the movements of their mouths matched up with the Japanese language.

After that, he did some more experiments.

His conclusion was that someone had fed the people of this world some sort of Translation Konnyaku. However, he did not know who had fed that substance to them.

The language of this world would be translated before the other party heard it.

If he could understand what the other person said, then he should be able to communicate with non-human lifeforms, like say, a dog or a cat. The question now was who had done this. In addition, the village chief did not find this strange.

It seemed perfectly natural to him.

—-In other words, this was a basic principle of the world. Then again, when one thought about it calmly, this was a magical world, which might run on completely different precepts than the world in which Ainz had been born.

It would seem that the basic knowledge and facts he had learned in his previous life were no longer applicable here. This was a grave problem.

If he was ignorant about this world, there was a chance he might make a fatal mistake. "Ignorance" was synonymous with "disaster", in this case.

Right now, Ainz lacked information about his surroundings. He had to solve this problem quickly, but he had no idea where to begin. Could it be that he

had to kidnap someone and make him talk about what he knew? That was not a very workable option.

That being the case, there was only one alternative left to him.

"...It would seem I will need to live in a city for a while."

He had to observe and imitate many things in order to learn about the world. He also needed to understand the magic of this world, and many other things about it.

As he thought about this, he heard footsteps from outside the flimsy wooden door. There was a large delay between the sounds of the footsteps, which meant that whoever it was, they were not advancing quickly. Those were the steady, plodding sounds of a grown man's footsteps.

A knocking came from the door just as Ainz turned to it. The chief could not help but look at Ainz's face. He dared not act of his own accord because he was still explaining things to his savior, as payment for saving him and everyone else in the village.

"Please, by all means. I was intending to take a break myself. I won't mind if you step outside."

"I'm very sorry about this," the chief said as he nodded in apology. He headed to the door, and when he opened it, a villager appeared. He looked first to the chief, then to Ainz, and said:

"Chief, I'm sorry to interrupt you when you're talking to our guests, but they're ready for the burial…"

"Oh…"

The chief looked to Ainz, his eyes begging for his approval.

"It's fine. There's no need to worry about me."

"Thank you. Then, tell the others that I will be there soon."

Part 2

The burial ceremony was held in a nearby communal graveyard. It was surrounded by a broken-down fence, and within were several circular stone slabs inscribed with people's names.

The village chief recited the verses to ease the spirits of the dead, and the words from his mouth appealed to a god that Ainz had never heard of in YGGDRASIL. It was a prayer that the spirits of the dead would find peace.

It appeared that there were not enough hands to bury all the bodies at once, so they chose to bury some of them first. To Ainz, burying the dead on the day they died was too hasty, but perhaps this was a normal practice for the faiths in this world.

He spotted the sisters he saved among the other villagers — Enri Emmott and Nemu Emmott. Their parents' bodies were among those that would be buried today.

As he watched the villagers from close by, he idly stroked a 30 centimeter long wand under his robe. The wand was made of ivory and capped with gold. There were runes over the grip and it radiated an aura of holiness.

It was a Wand of Resurrection.

It was a magic item which could return the dead to life. Of course, Ainz did not possess just one of these wands. He had enough to resurrect all the dead in the village, with room to spare.

According to the village chief, this world's magic did not have the power to raise the dead. That being the case, if he used the wand of resurrection, he would create a miracle in this village. However, after the prayer finished, as the burial ceremony neared its end, Ainz returned the wand to his inventory.

He could have brought them back to life, but he chose not to. This was not because he felt that the souls of the dead were the domain of the gods, or some other religious reason. It was simply because he felt that there were no benefits in doing so.

It was not hard to tell which would be more threatening, a magic caster that could take lives, or a magic caster which could return them. In addition, the chances of the villagers keeping the secret would be very low, even if he ordered them not to talk about the resurrections.

The power to conquer death was something that everyone craved.

If things were different, he might have used that power to recall people to life. However, he did not have enough information on the local conditions, so it would be unwise to do so now.

"They should be content with the fact that the village was saved," Ainz muttered as he looked at the Death Knight that was standing behind him.

The Death Knight was another mystery.

In YGGDRASIL, all summoned monsters would vanish after a certain time unless special methods were used in their summoning. He had not used any such methods to summon the Death Knight and its summoning time was long past, but it remained here.

Although he had many hypotheses for this phenomenon, he still did not know enough to come to an answer. As Ainz was thinking about this, a pair of figures turned up beside him.

One was Albedo, and the other was roughly humanoid, but resembled a spider dressed in a ninja uniform. Its eight legs were tipped with sharp blades.

"An Eight Edge Assassin? Albedo, this is…"

Ainz looked around, but it seemed like none of the villagers were paying attention here. Albedo was one thing, but bringing a monster here would make them the center of attraction, even if the burial was going on.

Just then, Ainz remembered that Eight Edge Assassins were monsters that could go invisible.

"I brought him over because he wanted to pay his respects to you, Ainz-sama."

“Oh, how refreshed my soul is whenever I see Ainz-sa—”

“—Enough of that. Are you part of the support troops?”

“Yes. There are 400 vassals beside myself who stand ready to assault the village at any time.”

Assault? How had it ended up like this? As Ainz pondered that problem, he began muttering to himself — Sebas had no talent for passing messages.

“...There’s no need for an assault, the problem’s already been taken care of. Who’s your commander?”

“That would be Aura-sama and Mare-sama. Demiurge-sama and Shalltear-sama remain in Nazarick on alert, while Cocytus-sama is supervising Nazarick’s perimeter security.”

“I see… well, too many cooks spoil the broth. Everyone but Aura and Mare are to fall back. How many of you Eight Edge Assassins are there?”

“There are 15 of us in total.”

“Then you can stay with Aura and Mare.”

After watching the Eight Edge Assassin nod in acknowledgement, Ainz turned his eyes back to the burial. They were about to fill in the graves, and the two girls were crying non-stop.

♦ ♦ ♦

In order not to interrupt the burial, Ainz strolled leisurely toward one of the roads leading to the village. Behind him were Albedo and the Death Knight.

Though his information-gathering had been interrupted by the funeral. Ainz had still managed to learn much about the region and the ways of this world. By the time he left the village chief’s home, the sun was going down.

It would seem his little hero act — to pay forward the kindness his old friend showed him — had taken more time than expected.

Still, the time spent here had not been wasted. In particular, the more he learned about this world, the more he realised he did not know. It was enough that he was aware of his ignorance.

As Ainz watched the magnificent sunset, he thought about what he needed to do.

It was dangerous to move around in this world when he did not understand anything about it. Ideally, he should finish gathering information and then begin acting in this world under a false identity. Although, after saving this village, hiding his identity was impossible.

Even if the knights were exterminated, their parent country would unearth the truth. Much like in the previous world where forensic science was well-developed, this new world might have its own ways of finding out the truth, and they might be very efficient in doing so.

Also, even if they made no investigation, as long as the villagers survived, someone would eventually follow the trail back to Ainz. To prevent a leak, he could take them all into the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick. However, the country that these villagers belonged to would not take that lying down, and they might even treat it as a kidnapping.

Therefore, he had stated his name, and let the knights flee.

There were two reasons for that.

The first reason was that news about Ainz would get around as long as he did not hole up in Nazarick. Therefore, it would be better if he controlled how the information got out.

The second was because he wanted to spread the word that Ainz Ooal Gown saved a village and slew the knights. In particular, he wanted to let any players from YGGDRASIL hear about it.

Ainz planned to take up residence in either the Kingdom, the Empire or the Theocracy.

If there were other players in these countries, there should be some trace of them. In contrast, if Ainz used Nazarick's personnel to gather this information, it would not only be troublesome, but very risky. For instance, given Albedo's personality, giving her the wrong kind of orders would end up making him unnecessary enemies.

Therefore, from an information-gathering point of view, joining one of the countries was a very good idea.

It would also be good to have one of them as backing in order to ensure the autonomy of Nazarick. After all, he could not take these countries lightly while he was not aware of their power. In addition, he could not lower his guard as long as he did not know who was the most powerful person in this new world. For all Ainz knew, there might be someone stronger than him among these three nations.

While there were a lot of drawbacks to becoming part of one of these kingdoms, there were many advantages as well .The question was the capacity in which he would join one of these countries.

He was not interested in being a slave. Neither was he interested in becoming part of a black-hearted enterprise like the one Herohero-san was in. Therefore, he needed to make his existence known to these factions. After having a closer look at their respective situations and how they treated him, he would move toward the most ideal of the factions.

These were the basics of job-hopping.

In that case, when should he make his move? He might end up exposing his weaknesses while he remained ignorant.

Ainz shook his head as he thought about that, as though he were tired. After all, he had been ceaselessly using his mind for the past few hours, and it was overstressed.

"Haa… let's leave it at this. We've finished everything we need to do here. Albedo, let's go back."

"Understood."

Albedo's reply sounded very tense. There should be no reason for her to be so on edge in a harmless place like the village.

In that case, there was only one reason he could think of for Albedo to be like this. Ainz quietly asked Albedo:

"...Do you hate humans?"

"I detest them. Humans are weak and inferior lifeforms. They would look so pretty if I squashed them like bugs… besides that girl."

Albedo's words were as sweet as honey, yet their meaning was terribly cruel.

Ainz felt that they did not fit Albedo's benign, goddess-like beauty. Therefore, he said:

"I see… I understand how you feel. However, I hope you can control yourself for the time being, because we have to put on a show."

Albedo nodded energetically. As Ainz looked at her, he began to feel frustrated.

Her likes or dislikes would not be a problem for now, but the future was a different matter.

Understanding his subordinates was an important skill he had to master.

After Ainz realized this, he began looking for the village chief. it was basic manners to bid someone farewell before leaving.

He found the chief almost immediately, talking to some of the villagers. He had a stern look on his face, but it did not seem normal. Indeed, he seemed to be quite wound up.

What was happening now?

Ainz resisted the urge to go "Cheh" and approached the chief. After all, he had saved them once; that meant that they were his responsibility.

"...What's wrong, Chief-dono?"

The chief's face lit up, as though he had glimpsed a golden shiny wire of hope.

"Oh, Ainz-sama. It would seem there are some mounted people who look to be warriors approaching us…"

"I see…"

The chief and the other nearby citizens looked at Ainz, worried expressions on their faces.

Ainz gently raised his hand as he saw this, which filled everyone with relief as he said:

"Leave it to me. Gather all of the survivors into the village chief's house right now. The chief and I will remain here."

A bell rang, and the villagers gathered. The Death Knight took up a position near the chief's house, while Albedo remained behind him, awaiting orders.

In order to dispel the chief's unease, Ainz cheerfully said:

"Please be at ease. I will make an exception and handle this for free."

The chief no longer trembled, and smiled bitterly instead. Perhaps he had prepared himself to take this risk.

After a while, they finally sighted many mounted warriors along the road leading to the village. The horsemen slowly entered the square.

"...They aren't uniformly equipped, and each of them is outfitted differently… are they not regular troops?" Ainz mused as he observed the men and their wargear.

The knights from before had breastplates bearing the sigils of the Baharuth Empire, and they were heavily equipped, each in the same way. While these men were wearing armor as well, their gear varied from man to man. Some

wore leather armor and some did not have their plate armor on, exposing the chainmail underneath.

Some of them wore helmets, while some went bareheaded. About the only thing they had in common was that they each showed their faces. All of them had swords of similar make, but apart from that, they also carried bows, javelins, maces, and other backup weapons.

One could say that they looked like hardened veterans of the battlefield. A less polite way would be to say that they were a ragtag bunch of sellswords.

The riders finally entered the square. There were around 20 of them, and while they were wary of the Death Knight, they formed up neatly before Ainz and the village chief. A man stepped forward from the rest of the force.

He seemed to be the leader of the horsemen. He looked like the fiercest and most eye-catching one of his men.

The leader's eyes rested briefly upon the village chief before lingering on the Death Knight and then he turned toward Albedo. He took a long time looking at her. However, once he satisfied himself that none of them were going to move, he immediately turned his keen gaze on Ainz.

Although the man looking at him seemed to be the sort who made his living by violence, Ainz remained still. A look like that could not hope to raise any ripples on the still lake of Ainz's heart.

It was not because Ainz did not fear those eyes, but because of his undead body. Perhaps he was full of confidence because he could use his powers from YGGDRASIL.

Once satisfied, the leader spoke in a grave tone:

"—I am the Warrior-Captain of the Re-Estize Kingdom, Gazef Stronoff. By order of the King, I have been visiting each of the frontier villages to exterminate knights from enemy countries who have been making trouble here."

His even baritone echoed through the village square, and there was some commotion from the chief's house behind Ainz.

"The Kingdom's Warrior-Captain…"

Won't anyone tell me what's going on? Ainz thought as he spoke to the chief, his voice carrying a hint of rebuke:

"...What sort of man is he?"

"According to the traders, he was a man who claimed the championship of the martial arts tournament held before the King, and now he leads the elite warriors who are loyal to the King."

"Is the man before us truly so amazing…?"

"...I do not know. All I heard were stories."

Ainz looked closely, and he saw that each of the horsemen had the same emblems on their chests, which resembled what the chief had said about the Kingdom's emblems. That said, he did not have enough reliable information to be sure.

Gazef looked at the chief and said, "You must be the chief of this village. Can you tell me who is the person beside you?"

Ainz interrupted the chief, who was about to answer, before nodding to Gazef and introducing himself.

"There is no need for that. Pleased to meet you, Warrior-Captain-dono of the Kingdom. My name is Ainz Ooal Gown, and I am a magic caster. This village was attacked by knights, and so I stepped in to rescue them."

Gazef immediately dismounted, his armor clattering loudly as he did. He bowed deeply once he was on the ground.

"Thank you for saving this village. I have no words that can adequately praise your kindness."

The air seemed to tremble.

The Warrior-Captain was a man from a privileged class of society. It was quite shocking that such a man would bow and scrape before a nobody like Ainz, in this world where people were so clearly divided amongst each other. From what he had heard, the concept of human rights was almost nonexistent in this country — no, in this world. A few years ago, the Kingdom still sanctioned the slave trade.

One could tell Gazef's character from the way he was ready to dismount and bow to Ainz despite their difference in status.

This man was definitely the Kingdom's Warrior-Captain, Ainz concluded.

"...Please, do not stand on ceremony. In truth, I did this for payment, so no thanks is needed."

"Oh, a payment. Does this mean that you are an adventurer?"

"That is close enough to the truth."

"Oh… I see. You must be an extraordinary adventurer, then. Although, forgive my ignorance, but I have not heard your mighty name before, Gown-dono."

"I was travelling, you see, and I just happened to pass by. I am nobody famous."

"...Travelling, you say. Though I regret having to waste the time of such a great adventurer, could you please tell me about the blackguards who attacked this village?"

"It would be my pleasure, Warrior-Captain-dono. Most of the knights who have attacked this village are already dead, so they will not be able to make trouble for the time being. Shall I go on?"

"...Already dead... Gown-dono, did you strike them down?"

After listening to the way Gazef spoke, Ainz realised that this world's form of address was Western-style, and not Japanese-style. In other words, it went in

the order of name, then surname, and not surname, then name. At last, he had solved the mystery of why the chief looked so baffled when he had asked the chief to call him Ainz. It was only expected that he would look like that when asked to address someone in such an unfamiliar way.

After realising his mistake, Ainz covered it up with his salaryman's thick skin and replied:

"...Well, that is not entirely accurate…"

Gazef picked up on the hint in Ainz's tone, and turned his eyes toward the Death Knight. He must have smelled the faded scent of gore and death that came from it.

"I have a couple of questions… may I know who that is?"

"He is a servant that I have created."

Gazef murmured in approval, and then looked Ainz up and down with a keen gaze.

"Then… how about that mask?"

"I wear it for reasons known only to a magic caster."

"May I remove that mask?"

"Sadly, I must refuse," Ainz said as he gestured to the Death Knight. "It would not be good if I lost control of him."

A look of shock flashed across the faces of the chief and gasps came from the villagers hiding within the chief's house. Perhaps he had sensed the change in the air and seen the look on the chief's face, but Gazef nodded deeply and said:

"I see. Then, we'd best not take it off."

"Thank you."

"Then—"

“Before that, I have a request you might not like to hear. This village was recently attacked by knights of the Empire, and if you gentlemen brought your weapons in, it might trigger unpleasant memories in the villagers. May I ask you to place your weapons in a corner of the village square, to put the people at ease?”

“...It is as you say, Gown-dono. However, this sword was given to me by the King. I cannot set it down without his express permission.”

“—Ainz-sama, we will be fine.”

“Is that so, Chief-sama… then, please forgive my unreasonable request, Warrior-Captain-dono.”

“No, I see the logic in your thinking, Gown-dono. If this sword was not personally awarded to me by the King, I would gladly lay it aside. Then, could we sit down and discuss the details. Also, the sky is growing dark, and we would like to rest in this village for the night…”

“I understand. Then, let us return to my home together—”

In the middle of the chief’s reply, one of the horsemen ran into the square. He was panting heavily, and had an urgent report. In a high-pitched voice, the horseman said:

“Warrior-Captain! We’ve sighted a lot of people around the village! They’ve surrounded the village and they’re closing in!”

Part 3

“Everyone, take heed,” a calm voice spoke into everyone’s ears.

“The prey has entered the cage.”

The speaker was a man.

He had no distinguishing features, and he would not stand out in a crowd. However, there was no emotion in his seemingly man-made black sclerae or the scar on his face.

“Offer up your faith to the gods.”

Everyone began their silent prayers, a shortened version of their usual praise to their gods.

They had to spend time in prayer even when operating in another country. This was not complacency on their part, but a symbol of their faith in their gods.

These men who offered everything to the Slaine Theocracy and the gods they revered were far more devout than the average citizen of the Theocracy. This was why they could perform cruel acts without the slightest bit of hesitation, and why they felt no guilt for doing so.

After their prayers, the eyes of every man present were as hard and cold as glass.

“Begin.”

With that one single word, they neatly encircled the village in a way that would appear to onlookers as the product of long, hard training.

♦ ♦ ♦

These men were a black ops group from the Slaine Theocracy. Though their reputation spread far and wide, little was known about their members. They belonged to one of the Six Scriptures who answered directly to the high priests of the Slaine Theocracy. They were the Sunlight Scripture, whose mission was to exterminate demihuman settlements.

However, there were very few of these men, who were the most involved of the Six Scriptures in combat. There were only around a hundred of them in total.

This was because the recruitment standards for the Sunlight Scripture were very strict.

Entry required the ability to cast 3rd-tier divine magic, which was also the highest tier of magic that ordinary magic casters could reach. In addition, prospective recruits had to be in excellent physical condition, and they had to possess a strong will and deep faith.

In other words, they were the elite among other elite combatants..

The man quietly sighed as he watched his men disperse. Once they scattered to take their positions, it would be very hard to be sure of their movements. However, he was not worried about their skilful encirclement of the village.

The Sunlight Scripture's commander, Nigun Grid Luin, only felt the peace of mind that came with knowing that success was at hand.

The Sunlight Scripture was not used to long-term clandestine operations in the field. As a result, they had missed four chances to finish the mission in the past. They were exceedingly careful every time they closed in on Gazef and his men of the Kingdom, in order to avoid being spotted. If they missed this chance as well, these days of tracking and pursuing would drag on and on.

"Next time… I'd like to ask the other teams for help, and leave some of the work to them."

Someone answered Nigun's gripes.

"That's right, we've always been specialized in extermination, after all."

The speaker was one of the men who had stayed behind to protect Nigun.

"I mean, this is a strange mission. Usually, we would have backup from the Windflower Scripture for something as important as this."

"Indeed, I don't know why they only deployed us this time round. Still, this will be good experience for us. We can take this as training in infiltrating enemy territory. Hm, for all we know, that was what the people on top intended."

Nigun said that, but he was very clear that another mission of this nature would be very unlikely.

The orders he had been given were to “assassinate the greatest warrior of the Kingdom, the man famed in the surrounding countries for his matchless might, Gazef Stronoff.”

This was not the sort of task which would usually be assigned to the Sunlight Scripture. Instead, it would have been the province of the Theocracy’s most powerful special operations unit, the Black Scripture, whose members wielded the power of heroes. However, it was not possible this time round.

The reason was top secret, so he could not tell his subordinates, but Nigun knew the truth.

The Black Scripture was protecting the holy relic “Kei Seke Kouku” in preparation against the resurrection of the Catastrophe Dragon Lord, while the Windflower Scripture was busy chasing the traitor who had made off with a relic of the Miko Princesses. Neither of them had the free time to help them.

Nigun unconsciously felt the scar on his cheek.

He remembered the only time in the past where he had forced to flee with his tail between his legs. The face of that girl with the jet-black demonic sword rose in his mind.

Magic could have easily healed the wound without leaving a mark, but he had purposely left the scar to engrave the lesson of that humiliating defeat into his heart.

“...That damnable Blue Rose.”

The members of Blue Rose were citizens of the Kingdom, just like Gazef. Their priestess was the one who most drew his ire. Besides the fact that she was an infidel who worshipped another god, she had stopped Nigun while he was planning to attack demihumans, and even believed that she was on the side of justice in doing so.

"...Humanity is weak, and it uses any and all means to defend itself. Anyone who doesn't know that is an utter and complete fool."

One of the subordinates seemed to have sensed the anger smoldering in Nigun's glassy black eyes, and interjected:

"But, but the Kingdom is foolish too."

Nigun did not answer, although he agreed with those words.

Gazef was very strong, so in order to weaken him, they had to deprive him of his panoply.

♦ ♦ ♦

The Kingdom was divided into the Noble and the Royal factions. Since they were opposed to Gazef, a prominent figure in the Royal faction, the Noble faction was easily led to take political action to eliminate him. They did not even pause to consider that the impetus for their deeds came from a foreign power.

Gazef was a commoner who had risen to his current station by dint of his swordplay, and so the nobles despised him.

And that had led to this conclusion.

The Kingdom's trump card would soon be lost by their own hands.

That was a supremely foolish move to Nigun.

They — the Slaine Theocracy — might be divided into six sects, but whenever they needed to act, they did so as one.

One reason for that was because everyone respected each other's gods. The other was because everyone knew that there were many inhuman tribes and monsters in this world, and that they would be in danger if they did not work together.

"...Which is why everyone should walk the path of the righteous teachings together. Humanity should not fight amongst itself, but work hand in hand to bring about a better and brighter future."

Gazef would be the sacrifice for that.

"...Can we kill him?"

Nigun did not mock his subordinate's unease.

Their prey was the Kingdom's Warrior-Captain — the strongest man in the region, Gazef Stronoff.

Eliminating him would be more difficult than attacking and exterminating the inhabitants of a huge goblin village. In order to dispel his underlings' fear, Nigun calmly replied:

"It will be fine. Right now, he does not possess any of the Kingdom's treasures, the ones which he is permitted to bear. Without them, killing him will be a piece of cake… no, it would be better to say that without them, this is our only chance to kill him."

The Kingdom's Warrior-Captain, Gazef Stronoff, was famed as the strongest fighter in the land. But there was a reason for that reputation beyond his extraordinary swordsmanship.

That reason was the five heirlooms of the Kingdom. Although only four of them were known, he was permitted to bear all of them.

The Gauntlets of Vitality, that made their user immune to fatigue. The Amulet of Immortality, which constantly regenerated his wounds. The Guardian Armor, made of adamantite and enchanted to ward off critical hits. Razor's Edge, the sword created and enchanted in pursuit of sharpness, which could slice through armor like the proverbial hot knife through butter.

Even Nigun could not hope to triumph in a head-on attack against Gazef Stronoff, whose offensive and defensive ability increased astronomically when he used those items. No, it might well be that no human could defeat him

when he was like that. However, he did not have those treasures with him now, so this was a great chance for Nigun.

“And then… we also have a trump card of our own. This is a battle we cannot possibly lose.”

Nigun patted his chest lightly.

In this world, there were three types of magic items which fell outside the usual types and classifications.

The first kind were the relics from 500 years ago, left behind by the Eight Greed Kings who had conquered the world in an instant.

The next kind came from the Dragons, who were once the masters of the world before they were decimated by the Eight Greed Kings. The most powerful Dragons, the Dragon Lords, made the secret treasures of dragonkind.

And the third kind were the keystones of the Slaine Theocracy, the artifacts left behind from when the Six Gods descended upon the world 600 years ago.

Those were the three types.

What Nigun had in his breast pocket now was a rare treasure that very few people in the Slaine Theocracy possessed. In other words, it was Nigun’s secret weapon.

Nigun glanced at the metal band on his wrist. Numbers floated up from its surface, indicating that the appointed time had come.

“Then… begin the operation.”

Nigun and his subordinates began casting spells.

They summoned the highest-ranking angels their magic would permit.

♦ ♦ ♦

“I see… so there were people out there.”

Gazef peeked out at the people surrounding the village from inside the darkened house.

He could see three people within his field of vision. They were slowly advancing on the village while maintaining an even separation from each other.

They were unarmed and were not wearing heavy armor. However, that did not mean that they were pushovers. Many magic casters disliked such equipment and preferred lighter gear. This suggested that they were magic casters.

However, it was the winged monsters floating beside them which confirmed their vocations.

Angels.

Angels were monsters summoned from another world, and many people — particularly, the citizens of the Slaine Theocracy — believed them to be messengers of the gods. However, the priests of the Kingdom ruled that these so-called angels were merely summoned monsters.

While these religious disputes were part of the reason why the countries were set against each other, Gazef felt that their status as divine messengers was secondary to their strength as monsters.

To Gazef, angels and demons, their similarly-ranked counterparts, were stronger than many other monsters summoned using magic of a similar tier. Most of them had special abilities and some could even use magic. They were troublesome foes, in his reckoning.

Of course, that depended on the individual angel. Not all of them were difficult to beat.

However, the angels this time round, with their shining breastplates and flaming swords, were of a type that was unknown to him.

Ainz was watching them with him from the side. He asked Gazef, who did not know anything and could not gauge their strength:

"Who *are* these people? What do they want? I don't think there should be anything that valuable in this village..."

"Gown-dono, you do not know either? ...Well, if it is not wealth they seek, then there can only be one other answer."

Ainz and Gazef locked eyes.

"They must really hate you, Warrior-Captain-dono."

"It comes with the job of Warrior-Captain. However… this is troubling. Judging by the way the other side has so many people who can summon angels, they must be from the Slaine Theocracy… and it's clear that the people carrying out this operation must be a special operations unit… the legendary Six Scriptures. It would seem that both in numbers or ability, the opposition is superior to us."

Gazef shrugged, indicating the difficulty he was in. He might have seemed merely depressed on the surface, but inside, he was seething with anger and panic.

"Well, they've certainly gone to a lot of trouble, using the Noble faction to strip me of my gear. However, it's troublesome for that snake of a man to remain in the courts, so I guess it should be my good fortune to be able to recognize his villainy here. Still, I didn't expect the Slaine Theocracy to have their eyes on me…"

He snorted.

He did not have enough men, he was under-equipped for a battle like this, and he had no plan in mind. In short, he had nothing. Although, there might still be a trump card he could use.

"...Is that an Archangel Flame? It looks similar enough, but… what is a monster like that doing here… could it have been summoned by magic too? That means…"

Gazef turned to look at the mumbling Ainz. With a hopeful look on his face, he asked:

“Gown-dono, if it is alright with you, would you be willing to let me hire you?”

There was no answer, but Gazef could feel the weight of Ainz’s gaze beneath the mask.

“You may name your price and I will meet it.”

“...Please permit me to refuse.”

“...Even the loan of that knight you summoned would be fine.”

“...I must refuse that as well.”

“I see… then, what if I conscripted you, in accordance with the Kingdom’s laws?”

“That would be the worst decision you could make… I did not plan to say such harsh words, but if you insist on using the authority of the Kingdom to conscript me, then I would be compelled to put up a bit of resistance.”

The two of them looked wordlessly at each other. The first to avert his eyes was Gazef.

“...That would be frightening indeed. We would be wiped out before even crossing blades with the gentlemen of the Slaine Theocracy.”

“Wiped out… well, that’s a good joke. However, I am glad you understand me.”

Gazef narrowed his eyes and looked at Ainz, whose head was nodded in thanks.

His words just now were not a joke, Gazef’s instincts told him. *Making an enemy of this magic caster would be a fatal error*.

In the face of this life-threatening danger, his instincts were more reliable than his meager intellect.

Who was he? Where did he come from?

As Gazef thought, he looked at Ainz's strange mask. What did he look like under the mask? Was he someone that he knew? Or…

"What's wrong? Is there something on my mask?"

"Ah, no. I simply felt that mask was very special. Since that mask is used to control that monster… then it must be a very powerful magic item… am I correct?'

"Well, about that… I should say that it's a very rare and valuable item. One could even say that it was exclusive."

Possessing a potent magic item implied that the possessor was a skilled individual. By that logic, Ainz must have been a very talented magic caster. Gazef felt a little saddened for not being able to secure his aid.

Although, part of him hoped that as an adventurer, Ainz would accept that request.

"...I see that it's meaningless to keep going on about this. Then, Gown-dono, please take care of yourself. Once again, thank you for saving this village."

Gazef removed his metal gauntlet and shook Ainz's hand. Originally, Ainz was thinking of removing his own Jarngreipr to return the courtesy, but in the end, he did not do so. Still, Gazef paid it no heed. He gripped Ainz's hand tightly, and said:

"I am truly, truly grateful to you for protecting these innocent villagers from being slaughtered. Also… I know it is very selfish of me and I have no authority to make you do anything… but I hope you can protect the villagers here, just one more time. Right now, I have nothing to give you, but I hope that no matter what, you will heed my plea… I beg you."

"About that…"

“If you should ever visit the Royal Capital, I will give you anything you desire. I swear this on the name of Gazef Stronoff.”

Gazef let go of Ainz’s hand, making to kneel, but Ainz extended his hand to stop him.

“...There is no need to go that far… Very well, I shall protect the villagers. I swear that on the name of Ainz Ooal Gown.”

After hearing Ainz swear on his name, Gazef breathed a sigh of relief.

“Thank you very much, Gown-dono. Now I have nothing more to worry about. All I need to do now is charge boldly ahead.”

“...Before that, please take this with you.”

Ainz took out an item and handed it to the smiling Gazef. It was a small, strangely carved statuette. There did not seem to be anything special about it. However—

“If it is a gift from your good self, I will gladly accept it. Then, Gown-dono. Time grows short, but I must now leave.”

“...Will you not you wait until nightfall before setting out?”

“The opposition should have spells like [Darkvision] and the like, so night fighting is not to our advantage, but I cannot imagine they will be hampered by it. Also… we also need to let you see how we stand or fall.”

“I see. As expected of the Kingdom’s Warrior-Captain, your keen insight is truly worthy of praise. Then, I wish you all the best, Warrior-Captain-dono.”

“And I wish you a safe journey home, Gown-dono.”

♦ ♦ ♦

Ainz quietly watched Gazef's back shrinking into the distance as he rode off. Although her master seemed to be thinking about something, she did not inquire further.

"...Haa...when I first saw the humans here, I could not help but think of them as insects… but after speaking with them, I have come to be fond of them, like small animals."

"Is that why you swore on your glorious name to protect them?"

"Perhaps… no, I should say that it was in response to how he bravely rode to his death..."

Ainz admired it.

He admired Gazef's determination, his strength of will that he did not have.

"...Albedo, order the servants to search out the ambushers around us and knock them out once they are found."

"I will do so at once… Ainz-sama, the village chief and the others are here."

As Ainz turned to look at Albedo, he caught sight of the chief and two other villagers coming over.

They reached Ainz's side, panting heavily. Filled with tension and unease, the chief spoke immediately, as though breathing were a luxury he could not afford.

"Ainz-sama, what should we do? Why did the Warrior-Captain leave us behind and not protect us?"

The chief's words were filled with fear, but there was an undercurrent of anger there as well.

"...He is doing what he must do, Chief-dono… The foe has their eye on the Warrior-Captain-dono, and if he stayed here, the village would become a battlefield. The enemy will not let you flee either. He left this place for your sake."

“I see, so that was why the Warrior-Captain left … Then, then should we remain here?”

“Of course not. They will come to kill you after they are done with the Warrior-Captain-dono. As long as you remain within their encirclement, you will have nowhere to run. However… while the foe is dealing with the Warrior-Captain-dono, you will have a chance to flee. You should take it.”

So that was why the Warrior-Captain rode out in force with his men. He planned to use himself as bait and lure the enemy away with a head-on attack.

The chief red-facedly lowered his head as he heard about the Warrior-Captain’s slim chances. The man was riding to his death just to give them a chance to flee. He cursed his inability to understand the man’s sacrifice, and how he mistook Gazef’s courage for selfishness and maligned him for it.

“I can’t believe I jumped to conclusions and wrongly blamed a good man… then, Ainz-sama, what should we do now?”

“What do you mean by that?”

“We live near the forest, but there’s no guarantee that we won’t be attacked by monsters. We were just lucky and thought that this place was safe, so we gave no thought to self-defense, and in the end, not only did we lose our friends and loved ones, but even became a burden…”

Now it was not just the chief, but the villagers behind him who had looks of regret on their faces.

“That could not be helped either. Your attackers were professional soldiers. If you had tried to resist, you might have all been dead before I got here.”

Ainz was trying to comfort the villagers, but none of them felt comforted at all. The fact was that no matter what pretty words he said, the loss of the villagers was an undeniable tragedy. All they could hope for was for time to heal their wounds.

“Village chief-dono, there is no more time. You must move quickly so as not to waste the Warrior-Captain’s determination.”

“I see… then, Ainz-sama, what will you do?”

“...I will stay here and observe the situation, and then wait for a good time to escort you all away.”

“We are always making trouble for you, Ainz-sama, really, we…”

“...Think nothing of it. Because I made a promise to the Warrior-Captain-dono… in any case, gather all the villagers into one of the larger houses. I will further protect it with magic.”

Part 4

He could feel his horse’s agitation through his feet.

Even a trained warhorse — no, it was because it was a warhorse that the beast knew it was riding into death.

There were only four or five of the enemy surrounding the village, so there was a large gap between each of them. However, their encirclement was most likely airtight.

In other words, they had set a trap for him, and if he sprang it, he would die.

Even so, Gazef was still determined to break through them. No, going by the present circumstances, a forceful breakthrough was the only choice for him.

He had no chance against them in ranged combat.

If he had skilled archers by his side, it would be a different matter. If not, he had to avoid a long-range battle with magic casters.

Fighting a defensive battle would be even more stupid.

It would be one thing if they had stone-walled houses or a sturdy fort to fight from, but he had no confidence at all in the ability of wooden walls to stop

magic. For all he knew, both Gazef and the houses might go up in smoke together.

Therefore, the last tactic he could use was a thoroughly unethical one.

That was to say, he would have to shift the theater of battle into the village and draw Ainz Ooal Gown into the fight, thus forcing his involvement.

But if he did that, it would completely defeat the purpose of coming here in the first place. Therefore, Gazef had to put himself into danger.

“Hit the enemy hard and draw in the sentries from around the village. After that, fall back immediately. Do not hesitate and miss your chance to flee.”

After hearing the energetic replies from behind him, Gazef frowned.

How many of the men here would be able to go back alive?

They were not any more talented than ordinary people. Nor were they born with superpowers or special talents. They were just a group of men who had trained hard under Gazef. Losing the fruits of his labor here would be a terrible waste.

Gazef was going to make a stupid, senseless sacrifice, and his men were going to follow him into it. He wanted to apologize to these men, that he had drawn in with him, but once he turned around and saw them, those words died in his mouth.

What he saw were the faces of true warriors, fearless men who knew where they were headed and who had swallowed any complaints about the matter..

There was no need to apologize for the looks on his men’s faces, that look which said that they knew they were riding into danger, but they would go into it regardless. One by one, the men shouted to the embarrassed Gazef:

“Don’t worry, Warrior-Captain!”

“Yeah, we all came here of our own free will, to fight and die by your side, Warrior-Captain!”

“Please let us protect our country, our people, and our friends!”

There was nothing left to say. Gazef returned their shouts with a thunderous cry:

“Then, forward! Tear their guts out!”

“Ohhhhhhhhhhhh!”

Gazef’s men spurred their horses forward to follow their leader. The galloping horses shot across the plains like an arrow loosed from a bow.

Still mounted, Gazef drew his bow and nocked an arrow to the string.

Though his horse shook and shuddered beneath him, Gazef calmly drew the string back. The loosed arrow struck its target unerringly, piercing the head of the frontmost magic caster… or at least, that was what he thought would happen.

“Cheh! It was useless after all. Maybe if I had a magic arrow, but… ah, I don’t have what I don’t have. Griping about it here is pointless.”

The arrow bounced off like it had struck a sturdy helmet. That supernatural hardness must have been the work of magic. Just as Gazef had said, in order to shoot through magic that protected against ranged attacks, he would need a magic weapon of his own.

Since Gazef did not have a weapon like that, he stopped shooting and put away his bow.

The magic casters began their counterattack, and cast their spells.

Gazef focused his energies, and took a stance in order to resist their magic.

Just then, the horse between his legs whinnied loudly and reared up, its front legs kicking the air.

“Go! Go! Go!”

He tightly gripped his reins and leaned forward, practically hugging the horse. Fortunately, his swift reflexes kept Gazef from being thrown off his force. While it had caused a sheen of cold sweat to bloom all over his body, at the very least, he had managed to suppress his brief panic. There was something more important before him.

A flustered and panting Gazef lashed his mount's flanks, but the horse remained still, as though someone more important than its rider were giving it orders.

This strange phenomenon could only mean one thing.

Mind-controlling magic.

The horse had been affected by such a spell. Gazef might have been able to fight off its effects, but the affected party was not a magical beast, but a mere warhorse, so resistance was not to be expected.

Anger flared up in Gazef for not predicting such an obvious form of attack. He leapt off his horse, and his galloping subordinates guided their mounts around him, flowing past him on both sides.

"Warrior-Captain!"

The last men of the group slowed down, extending their hands. They wanted to help Gazef onto their horse, but the angel looking down upon them from the heavens swooped down faster. Gazef drew his sword and swung at the angel.

The steel blade became a swift flash of light.

The stroke of the Kingdom's strongest man was enough to cleave a man's body in two. But the angel was not a man, and although it had taken a grave wound to its torso, it was not slain yet.

The blood spraying into the air was the mana that composed the angel. It vanished like smoke.

"No need for that! Turn around and charge them!"

After Gazef gave his orders, he turned a keen glare at the angel which had escaped with its life. It had been badly hurt, but it was still trying to find holes in Gazef's defenses.

"So that's how it is."

A strange feeling ran up his arms when his blade found its mark.

Gazef knew what it was. These monsters had a skill that would greatly reduce any damage done to them unless the attacking weapon was made of a special material. It was thanks to this ability that the angel could take a blow from Gazef without falling.

If that was the case...

Gazef focused his energies within himself and activated the martial art [Focus Battle Aura], and his blade glowed with a crimson light.

The angel took this opportunity to cut in with a sword of red flame. However —

"—Too slow."

In the eyes of the Kingdom's strongest warrior, Gazef Stronoff, the angel's movements were truly too slow.

Gazef's sword moved.

This blow was far more powerful than the one before it, and Gazef's sword sheared neatly through the angel's body.

Its body destroyed, the Angel seemed to melt in mid-air, its glittering wings flapping a few times before vanishing as though it had been nothing more than an illusion.

If Gazef had not been in such dire straits, he might well have applauded the light show. However, he did not have the time for that at the moment.

Gazef looked around, saw the enemies advancing on him in an endless tide — and smiled.

More angels flashed into existence around them as well.

Gazef was well aware that they were not ordinary reinforcements.

"...So, anything goes with magic, huh? Damn."

As he cursed the magic casters who could easily do what warriors could not, Gazef calmly took stock of the enemies surrounding him, and confirmed that this was everyone who was surrounding the village.

That would mean that the encirclement of the village was lifted.

"Then, Gown-dono, the rest is up to you."

The knowledge that he could save the surviving villagers filled Gazef's heart with endless joy. He smiled at the enemy's carelessness.

And then, the sound of hoofbeats filtered into Gazef's ears. It was the sound of Gazef's subordinates, charging back into the battle.

"I told you to scatter once the blockade went down… truly, you're a bunch of fools… and truly, I'm proud of you."

Gazef sprinted forward.

This might well be the best and only chance to end the battle. Judging by the speed of the horsemen, the enemy magic casters would need to focus all their attention on them. He would take advantage of this opportunity to cause chaos in their ranks. That was the only way.

His men's horses whinnied and reared up, just like Gazef's horse did. Several people moaned in pain as they were thrown off their horses, and the angels took the chance to press the attack.

Although his subordinates were on par with the angels in terms of fighting power, the latter had special abilities with the former did not possess, and

Gazef's men were soon plunged into dire straits. As he had expected, more than half of his men were fighting desperately for their lives. The spells of the magic casters only made things that much worse for them.

His men fell to the ground, one after the other.

Gazef averted his eyes, and ran forward again.

His target was the enemy commander.

He did not think the enemy would retreat if their commander went down, but that was the only way to save everyone.

Over 30 angels put themselves in the charging Gazef's way. He frowned as he saw the heavy defenses ahead of him.

"Out of my way—"

Gazef activated his trump card.

Heat bloomed from his hands, and spread to envelop his entire body.

Gazef broke the limits of his physical body and stepped into the realm of heroes. In addition, he activated several martial arts at once — one could call those a warrior's magic.

Gazef glared at the six angels surrounding him.

"[Sixfold Slash of Light]!"

This was a martial art that struck as fast as light. In one move, he hit the six angels around him.

All six of them were cut in half, dissolving into motes of light.

The reinforcements from the Slaine Theocracy gasped in surprise, while Gazef's men cheered.

Although his ultimate attack made his arms cramp up, it was not enough to decrease his fighting effectiveness.

Then, as though ordered to drown out the cheers, a huge wave of angels swept in, and one of them lunged at Gazef with its flaming sword.

“[Instant Counter]!”

Gazef used his martial art just as the angel swung, and his body blurred away like mist.

Halfway through its attack, the angel took a hit from Gazef. That hit reduced it to glittering dust.

But Gazef’s offensive did not end there.

“[Flow Acceleration]!”

With fluid, graceful moves, he dispatched the angels one after the other.

His ultimate attack took down two more angels again. This splendid display of martial technique inspired Gazef’s men and gave them a ray of hope.

But the Theocracy’s troops would not allow that to happen, and their commander erased that hope with mockery.

“Well done. However… that is all you can do. Clerics who have lost your angels, summon new ones. Focus your spells on Stronoff!”

The heat which had been building in the air immediately cooled off.

“This is bad.”

Gazef took down another angel as he muttered to himself. It would seem there would not be any more cheering no matter how many angels Gazef slew, since his men were worrying about the enemy coming at them.

They were superior in numbers, equipment, training and individual ability.

The sole weapon of Gazef's beleaguered men — their hope for victory — was gone.

After unconsciously evading an incoming sword, Gazef counterattacked, and destroyed an angel in one hit. However, the enemy he was aiming for was still far away.

Although his subordinates hoped otherwise, they needed magic weapons to break through the angels' damage reduction. They did not know how to use the [Focus Battle Aura] martial art like Gazef could, and without magic weapons, even if Gazef's men could injure the angels, they could not finish them off.

They were at their wits' end.

♦ ♦ ♦

Gazef bit his lip, and continued slashing.

His record for the most consecutive uses of his ultimate attack, [Sixfold Slash of Light], was rapidly increasing.

A warrior like Gazef could use six different kinds of martial arts at once, and combined with his hidden ultimate attack, that made seven martial arts at once.

Until now, he had been using martial arts to improve his physical attributes, fortify his mind, improve his magic resistance, temporarily render his weapon magical, as well as another technique that he used on hitting an opponent. That made five martial arts.

The reason why he had not pushed himself to the limit and used all seven at once was because powerful martial arts depleted one's concentration.

In particular, the [Sixfold Slash of Light] required three times the focus of his other techniques.

Gazef had two ultimate attacks like this, but he could only use them with four other martial arts at the same time.

He could easily defeat an angel with those techniques. But even if he struck them down, more of them were summoned anew. As long as he did not defeat their summoners, they would call up more angels to face him. While trying to run the opposition out of mana was an option, Gazef would probably tire before that.

The truth was, Gazef's arms were growing heavier and heavier, and his heart was racing.

[Instant Counter] was a martial art that forcibly corrected the body's balance after making an attack, resetting it to before the blow was struck. While that meant that the practitioner could immediately attack again, the forced reset of the body would place immense strain on it.

[Flow Acceleration] was a martial art that increased the speed at which one's nerves functioned, increasing one's attack rate. However, that technique created fatigue in the brain.

And then, there was the ultimate attack, the [Sixfold Slash of Light].

Using them put a great burden on the body, but without them, he would have no chance at all.

"Bring them all on! Your angels are nothing!"

His fearsome shout startled the Theocracy troops, but they soon recovered and renewed the offensive on Gazef.

"Pay him no heed, that's just the roar of a caged beast. Don't worry, deplete his strength bit by bit. But don't get too close. That beast's claws are long and sharp."

Gazef glared at the man with a scar on his face.

If only he could defeat him, he could turn the battle around. The problem was the other angel near him, different from the ones with the flaming swords. And then there was the great distance between them, and the several layers of defenses in the way.

They were simply too far apart.

“The beast is about to make a break for it. Show him the meaning of the word ‘impossible’.”

The man’s calm voice only served to aggravate Gazef further.

Even if he stepped into the realm of heroes, Gazef could not win with his refined melee techniques alone.

Still — so what? If that was the only road available to him, then he would have to charge down it with all his strength.

As the strength returned to his eyes, Gazef began his charge.

However, the road ahead was hard, like he had expected.

The angels loomed before him, one after the after, swinging their swords of scorching red flame. As he evaded and counterattacked and destroyed the angels one after the other, Gazef suddenly felt an intense pain. It felt like he had been struck hard in the belly.

As he looked in the direction of the pain, he saw a group of magic casters casting a spell of some sort.

“Well, if you’re priests, you should act like it. How about a little healing over here!”

As though to answer Gazef’s jibe, an invisible force smashed into Gazef’s body.

Even if the enemy used invisible attacks, Gazef was confident that he could avoid them by reading traces in the air and the looks on his opponent’s faces. That might even have worked, if there were only a few of them. However, against 30 of those attacks, there was nothing he could do. Just keeping his sword in his hands was taking all his strength.

The pain filled his whole body. He had no idea where it was coming from, only that it was so great it almost made him collapse.

“Gahaah!”

The taste of steel welled up in his throat, and Gazef spat a mouthful of fresh blood. The sticky ichor welled out of his mouth and stained his chin.

Gazef’s legs were shaky after that barrage of invisible blows, and now an angel was swinging its flaming sword at him.

He could not avoid the blow, and it struck his armor. Fortunately, it deflected the sword, but the impact travelled through the breastplate and deep into his body.

He swung wildly at the angel, but his poor balance meant that the angel easily evaded the attack.

Gazef’s sword trembled in his hands as he gasped for breath.

The fatigue that filled his body seemed to be whispering into his ear, telling him to just lie down and rest.

“The hunt has entered its final stages. Do not let the beast rest — order your angels to attack consecutively.”

Even though Gazef desperately wanted a moment to recover, the angels surrounding him obeyed their masters and mercilessly attacked him, one after the other.

He somehow evaded the attack from behind, and parried a thrust from the side. He used the strong angles of his armor to deflect an angel’s charge from above.

Gazef wanted to counterattack his foes, but he was greatly outnumbered.

As his strength diminished, he could only take out one opponent at a time, since he lacked the stamina to use martial arts. As his subordinates fell one by one, the enemy’s attacks were concentrated on him. With no way to break through the enemy’s encirclement, he felt death closing in on him.

His concentration faltered, and he nearly fell to one knee. He desperately tried to refocus so he could fight.

The invisible impacts came again, striking the tottering Gazef.

The world before him shook mightily.

Not good!

Gazef used all his strength to try and maintain his balance. However, something seemed wrong with his body, and the strength that should have held him up was nowhere to be found.

The itch of touching the grass spread through his body, and Gazef realised that he had fallen.

He struggled to rise again, but his body betrayed him. The angels' swords meant death for him.

"Now, finish him off, but do not send in one angel. Use them all to ensure he is dead."

Yes, he was dead.

His well-trained hands were shaking uncontrollably, and he could not pick up his longsword. Even so, he could not give up.

His gritted teeth made creaking sounds.

Gazef was not afraid of death. He had taken many lives in the past, so he was prepared to meet his end on the battlefield.

Like he had told Ainz, he was hated by people. That hatred became a sword that would one day pierce his body.

But he could not accept an end like this.

They had attacked several villages and murdered defenseless, innocent villagers, all to lure Gazef into a trap. He could not allow himself to die at the hands of honorless dogs like this, and he could not bear his powerlessness.

“Gaaaaaaah! Don’t look down on me—!”

He shouted with all the strength in his body.

Blood dribbled out the side of his mouth as Gazef rose to his feet.

A man who should have been powerless to stand now stood proudly, the mighty force of his presence forcing back the angels that surrounded him.

“Haaa—! Haaa—!”

Just getting to his feet made it made him breathe hard. His mind was a blur and his body felt like it had turned to mud. But he could not lie down. If he lay down, all would be lost.

This little bit of pain he felt could not compare to the suffering of the dead villagers.

“I am the Warrior-Captain of the Re-Estize Kingdom! I am a man who loves and defends his country! How can I lose to bastards like you who stain my country with your footsteps—!”

He was certain that great man would protect the villagers.

Then, what he should do was defeat as many of the enemy as he could , so the people would not meet the same fate as all the others.

Protecting the future people of the Kingdom. That was all he wanted to do.

“...You will die here because all you can do is babble that nonsense, Gazef Stronoff.”

Gazef glared at the enemy commander as his cruel mockery reached his ears.

“If only you had abandoned these villagers on the border, you would not be dying here. You probably don’t know, but your life is far more valuable than even a thousand of these peasants. If you truly love your country, you should have abandoned them to die.”

“You and I… will never see eye to eye… let’s go!”

“What can that body of yours do? Cease your pointless struggles and lie down quietly. As a final act of mercy, I will kill you without drawing out your suffering.”

“If you think… I’m helpless… then why don’t you come... take my head? It should be easy… if I’m like this, right?”

“...Hmph. You’re all talk. It looks like you still want to fight. Do you think you can win?”

Gazef simply stared straight ahead, his hands trembling as he gripped his sword. He focused on the enemy in front of him, ignoring the angels surrounding him.

“...What a pointless effort. Truly, you are an idiot. After we kill you, we will then massacre the villagers you saved. All you have done is bought them a fear-filled stay of execution.”

“Kuh. kuh… kuku…”

Gazef was smiling brightly.

“...What’s so funny?”

“...Hmph, you fool. In that village… is a man who is stronger than me. His power is unfathomable, but he could take you all out by himself… Trying to kill… the villagers he protects… is impossible for you.”

“...Someone stronger than the Kingdom’s greatest warrior? Do you think boasting like that will do you any good? You truly are an idiot.”

Gazef was still smiling. What kind of look would Nigun have on his face when he met that inscrutable man called Ainz Ooal Gown? Seeing that would probably be the best gift Gazef could receive before heading off to the afterlife.

"...Angels, kill Gazef Stronoff."

Countless wings moved in response to that cold, cruel order.

Gazef steeled himself, preparing to run forward, when suddenly a voice came past him:

—Looks like it's about time to switch.

The scenery before Gazef changed, and he was no longer on that bloodsoaked plain. Instead, he was in the corner of what looked like a simple village hut.

There were worried-looking villagers all around him.

"This, this is..."

"This is a warehouse that Ainz-sama has protected with his magic."

"So you're the chief… Gown, Gown-dono does not seem to be here."

"No, he was here just a moment ago, but he seems to have vanished without a trace, and in his place, you appeared, Warrior-Captain-sama."

I see, so the voice in my head was...

Gazef allowed himself to relax. He would have no part to play in what would come next. Gazef collapsed to the ground, and the villagers hurriedly drew closer.

The Six Scriptures. An enemy that even Gazef Stronoff, the strongest warrior in the region, could not hope to defeat.

Yet, he could not even begin to imagine that Ainz would lose.

第五章 死之統治者

Overlord Volume 1

CHAPTER 5

RULER OF DEATH

Part 1

There was no trace of the intense battle that had taken place earlier on the plains.

The light of the setting sun covered up the blood staining the grass, and the stench of blood was blown away by the wind.

There were two figures on the plains who had not originally been there.

Nigun of the Slaine Theocracy's special operations unit — the Sunlight Scripture — looked at them with perturbation in his eyes.

One of them was dressed like an arcane magic caster. He(?) wore an evil-looking mask to hide his face, and a pair of iron gauntlets on his hands. He wore an expensive-looking black robe, suggesting he was a person of some status.

The other one was dressed in a suit of jet-black full plate armor. It looked very impressive, and it was certainly some sort of masterwork magic item. One look at the exterior was enough to tell that it was a high-end magic item.

The beleaguered Gazef and his men were gone without a trace. In their place were these two mysterious individuals. It seemed to be some kind of teleportation magic, but he had no idea what kind of spell had been used here. He had to be wary of the mysterious magic caster.

Nigun called the angels back, ordering them to form a defensive perimeter on their side. His assiduous gaze studied their movements, and then the magic caster stepped forward:

"Pleased to meet you, gentlemen of the Slaine Theocracy. I am Ainz Ooal Gown. I would be glad if you could call me Ainz."

He was some distance away from them, but the wind carried his voice over clearly.

Nigun did not respond, and thus the mysterious man called Ainz continued:

"The person behind me is called Albedo. I would like to make a deal with you. Might I have a moment of your time?"

Nigun tried to attach some meaning to the name Ainz Ooal Gown, but it was no use. It might be an alias. Perhaps trying to glean some information from him would be more productive. With that, Nigun raised his chin, indicating that Ainz should continue.

"Wonderful. Thank you for taking the time to listen to me. Then, I would like to start by making one thing clear to you gentlemen. That would be — there is no way you can defeat me."

He could hear the absolute confidence in that statement. This was not a bluff or a boast. This was something that the man Ainz Ooal Gown believed from the bottom of his heart.

Nigun furrowed his brows.

In the Slaine Theocracy, nobody would dare speak in such a way to their betters.

“Ignorance is truly deplorable. You will pay the price for your foolishness.”

“...Really now. Do you really think that will happen? I observed your battle earlier, so my presence here would indicate that I am confident of victory. After all, if I was not sure that I could beat you, would it not be wiser for me to leave that man to die?”

He was right.

An arcane magic caster would be better suited to different kinds of confrontations. Arcaners, sorcerers and wizards could only use light armor, so they would want to avoid melee combat, using [Fly] to repeatedly launch [Fireballs] and other such spells from afar. Yet Ainz had chosen to face them head-on. He must have a trick up his sleeve.

After a period of silence, Ainz spoke again:

“I have a question for you, if you can understand it. The angels you have brought with you should have been summoned by 3rd-tier magic. Am I correct?”

He was stating the obvious.

Ainz went on, ignoring Nigun’s puzzled expression:

“The monsters you summoned are similar to those in YGGDRASIL, so I was curious as to whether the names were the same. Many of YGGDRASIL’s monsters were derived from mythology… monsters like angels or demons should be no exception. Said angels and demons are most commonly associated with Christianity, but it seems quite unnatural that something called an archangel exists in a world without Christianity. That would mean someone like myself must exist in this world.”

Nigun had no idea what Ainz was talking about and his ire was rising. He asked:

“That’s enough of your self-absorbed prattle. Now tell me; where is Stronoff?”

“I teleported him to the village.”

“...What?”

Nigun had not expected Ainz to answer. He thought of why Ainz would say that and replied:

“How foolish. Even if you tell a lie like that, a quick search of the village will—”

“—It is not a lie. I merely answered your question. Well, there is another reason for why I answered your question.”

“...Could it be that you want to beg for mercy? If you help us save some time, I can consider it.”

“Nonono… well… the truth is, I overheard your conversation with the Warrior-Captain. What a lot of balls you have.”

Ainz’s tone changed suddenly, and he continued speaking as he looked at the mocking Nigun.
“To think you would dare say that you would massacre the villagers that I, Ainz Ooal Gown, took the time to personally rescue. I cannot think of anything that is more offensive than that.”

Ainz’s robe rippled in the wind. That same wind blew across Nigun and company.

The cold wind just happened to be blowing from Ainz's direction, but Nigun hurriedly brushed away the phantom image that loomed in front of him. Yes, that vision of death before him must have been an illusion.

"...What, what do you mean by 'offensive', magic caster? What of it?"

Although he was obviously frightened, Nigun did not change his mocking tone.

He was the commander of one of the Slaine Theocracy's secret weapons, the Sunlight Scripture. How could he be afraid of a single man's name? It was impossible. It could not be possible.

Yet—

"I mentioned a deal earlier. These are the terms. You will hand your lives over to me without resistance. In exchange you will not have to suffer. However, if you put up a fight, then the price you fools shall pay is to die in despair and agony."

Ainz took a step forward.

It was just a single step, but Ainz's body seemed to swell massively before their eyes. Cowed by him, the men of the Sunlight Scripture reflexively took a step back.

"Ahh…"

Several hoarse cries came from around Nigun.

They were cries of fear.
His presence was filled with an unimaginable power. This was the first time Nigun had been faced with such might. Therefore, he could understand his men's fear.

Nigun was a powerful individual himself, a veteran of many battles who had grazed the edge of death countless times, who had taken many lives. He could feel the might radiating from the mysterious magic caster, an oppressive, potent pressure. It must have been worse for his men.

What kind of being was he?

What was the true identity of this magic caster? Who was the man beneath the mask?

Once more, Ainz ignored Nigun's panic and spoke coldly:

"That is why I did not lie to you and answered your question honestly. It is because there is no point in lying to those that are about to die."

Ainz spread his arms and took another step forward. He looked like he was about to hug them, but his evil-looking fingers reminded them of a lunging monster.

A thrill of cold ran from the bottoms of Nigun's feet to the top of his head. He had felt this countless times in his struggles along the edge of life and death. It was a sign of impending doom.

"Have the angels charge him! Don't let him get close!"

Nigun's voice broke slightly as he shouted his orders. It sounded more like a scream.

It was not to raise his men's spirits. He was simply afraid of Ainz Ooal Gown.

Two Archangel Flames flapped their wings in response to Nigun's command, launching an attack.

The angels flew straight up to Ainz, and stabbed at him with their flaming swords.

Albedo, who was standing behind him, should have blocked that attack. And so all of the Sunlight Scripture, who had been predicting that course of action, could not believe their eyes. It was not that anything happened. On the contrary—

Nothing happened.

Indeed, the man called Ainz Ooal Gown took no action. He simply allowed the angels to run him through. He did not dodge, block, cast a spell or have his follower intercept it. Nothing happened.

Their shock became mockery.

That act, pretending to be some mighty figure, was nothing but a bluff. It was not that Albedo did not wish to block it, but that Albedo could not respond in time to the high-speed attack of the Archangel Flame. Now that the truth was out, they did not seem like anything special at all.

His men breathed sighs of relief. Nigun, who felt quite silly for being so afraid, turned to Albedo.

“How unsightly. To think he would try to scare us with a bluff…”

Suddenly, a question came to mind.

Why was Ainz’s corpse not falling?

“...What are you doing? Call back the angels. He can’t fall down with those swords stuck in him.”

“But, but we’ve already given the order.”

His subordinates’ confused voices startled Nigun, and he looked at Ainz again.

The angels were desperately flapping their wings, like butterflies caught in a spider’s web.

The two angels slowly moved to the side. However, their movements were very strange. It looked as though someone was pushing them aside.

Following that, the body of Ainz — which had been blocked by the angels — appeared once more from the gap between them.

“...I told you, didn’t I? There is no way you gentlemen can defeat me. Shouldn’t you heed the warnings of others?”

The calm voice filtered into Nigun’s ears.

He could not comprehend the sight before him.

He was stabbed through his chest and abdomen, but Ainz was still standing, as though nothing were wrong.

“Impossible…” one of Nigun’s subordinates moaned, giving voice to the words in Nigun’s heart. Judging from the angle of the angels’ swords, they had to be fatal wounds. Even so, Ainz did not seem to be in any pain.

That was not the only shocking thing.

Ainz was gripping each of the angels by the throat. The angels struggled against him, but Ainz did not let them go.

“Impossible…”

Someone was muttering to themselves. Angels summoned from magic had bodies created from their summoners’ mana, so they were definitely not light. They weighed more than a grown man, and then there was the weight of their armor to consider as well. There was no way they could be lifted up by the throat so easily.

Granted, a well-trained warrior, with a stout and muscular body, might be able to do it. But the man before him, Ainz, was a magic caster who should have focused on training his intellect and arcane powers over honing his physique. Even if he were enhanced by magic, he would not be able to do anything if his base strength was low to begin with.

Then, why was this happening? Why did he seem completely unfazed, even after being impaled?

“…There must be some sort of trick.”

“Ah, definitely, how could anyone be fine after being run through by a sword?!”

Panic and fear spread through the Slaine Theocracy’s special forces unit. They were all veterans of numerous battles and had experienced many dangers in the past, but this was a sight they had never seen before. Not even the angels that Nigun could summon were capable of such a feat.

The doubtful mutterings about how he did not seem to be in pain and was speaking normally crept into Nigun’s ears.

“High-Tier Physical Nullification — a passive skill that negates the attacks of weapons with low data content and low-tier monsters’ attacks. It only protects against attacks of up to level 60 — in other words, attacks above level

60 can harm me. It is an all-or-nothing ability… to think it would actually see use here. Well then… these angels are in the way."

Holding an angel in each hand, Ainz slammed them both into the ground. There was a thunderous crash, and the earth trembled from the impact — a testament to Ainz's supernatural strength.

The angels died instantly, reverting to countless dancing motes of light which vanished into the air. Of course, the swords stuck in Ainz vanished as well.

"If I know how the angels were named, I can then understand how you can all use YGGDRASIL's magic. But let us leave this aside for now."

As Ainz slowly straightened up, he was still talking about things which nobody could understand.

However, that only intensified the Sunlight Scripture's fear of his mysterious power.

Nigun gulped.

"Alright, we'll end these pointless games here. Are you satisfied? Since it looks like you aren't willing to accept the deal, then it shall be my turn."

Ainz opened those hands of his, those hands which had crushed two angels to death. He seemed to be showing them that he had nothing in them.

His voice carried clearly through the bone-chilling silence, into the ears of everyone present.

"Are you ready? — it'll be a massacre."

A sudden spike of cold pierced his spine, followed by a surge of nausea. Nigun, the hardened killer who had presided over many slaughters, was now feeling something that he had never felt before.

He had to run. He had no way of beating Ainz, so doing battle with him would be very dangerous.

However, Nigun struggled to shake that feeling away. He had cornered his prey Gazef — how could he watch him get away now?

Still, a warning resonated from the depths of his soul. Nigun shouted his order:

"All angels, attack! Hurry!"

Every one of the Archangel Flames shot toward Ainz like bullets.

"What a lively lot… Albedo, step back."

Nigun could hear the cool, calm voice of someone who was being attacked by angels, but did not care. Ainz was surrounded by so many angels that nobody could even see him, but yet his voice did not carry even the slightest hint of worry.

It looked like he would be impaled by countless blades — no, Ainz's spell took effect before that.

"[Negative Burst]."

The air shuddered.

A wave of black radiance erupted from Ainz, like the negative image of a camera flash. It only lasted for an instant, but it had an immediate and obvious effect.

“Im-impossible…”

Someone muttered those words, carried by the wind. They could not believe what was happening before their eyes.

The angels, over 40 of them, had been annihilated by the black wave.

Their opponent had not used dispel magic to neutralize the summons. The angels that were blown away by the black wave had taken damage. In other words, Ainz had used a powerful spell to wipe out all the angels in one fell swoop.

Nigun could not help but tremble. He recalled the words of the Kingdom’s strongest warrior, Gazef Stronoff.

“...Hmph, you fool. In that village… is a man who is stronger than me. His power is unfathomable, but he could take you all out by himself… Trying to kill… the villagers he protects… is impossible for you.”

The scene before him proved the truth of those words.

Nigun erased those words from his mind, trying desperately to bring himself over.

Nigun knew that the members of the strongest special ops group, the Black Scripture, could also eliminate this many angels. In other words, all he had to do was treat Ainz as an opponent on their level. While he might be as strong as a member of the Black Scripture, he had the advantage of numbers on his side, so victory was still possible.

However, could those members of the Black Scripture take care of all these angels with just one spell?

Nigun shook his head to clear away his doubts. He could not think of that question. If he got his answer, then he would truly be done for. Therefore Nigun reached inside his coat, and touched the item within to give himself courage.

He fervently believed that as long as he held it, everything would be fine.

However, his subordinates did not have the same source of moral support that he did.

“U-uwaaaah!”

“What, what the hell!”

“It’s a monster!”

Once they realized their angels were useless, they wailed and fell back upon the spells that they knew and trusted.

“[Charm Person], [Iron Hammer of Righteousness], [Hold], [Fire Rain], [Emerald Sarcophagus], [Holy Ray], [Shockwave], [Confusion], [Charge of Stalagmite], [Open Wounds], [Poison], [Fear], [Word of Curse], [Blindness]...”

All kinds of spells rained down on Ainz.

Yet, even as the storm of magic lashed against him, Ainz was unmoved.

“Well, all of these are familiar spells...who taught them to you? The Slaine Theocracy? Someone else? There are more and more things I want to ask you now.”

Not only could he slaughter all their summoned angels in one move, their spells were also incapable of harming him.

Nigun felt like he was trapped in a nightmare.

“Hyaaaaah—!”

One of the men screamed wildly as he saw that his spells were ineffective. In desperation, he pulled out a sling and loaded it with a bullet. Although Nigun doubted the effectiveness of such a projectile when even an angel’s sword was useless, he did not stop the man.

The bullet that could easily shatter bone sped toward Ainz.

It was followed by a sound. That sound was like an explosion.

An instant.

It had happened in an instant.

Since they were in battle, they could not take their eyes off their target. However, Albedo — who should have been behind — had moved in a mysterious way in front of Ainz to defend him. The source of the apparent explosion was because she had violently kicked off the ground to get to where she was.

With a speed that the eye could not even see, Albedo swung her bardiche, tracing a beautiful curve of the weapon’s sickly green light in the air.

After that, the man with the sling slowly collapsed to the ground.

"...Huh?"

Nobody knew what had happened. They were the ones who had launched the attack, yet the result was completely opposite — one of them had fallen instead.

One of the men went over to inspect his dead comrade, and he shouted:

"His, his head's been smashed in!"

"...What? Smashed… don't tell me it's the sling bullet he threw!"

Why had he been killed by his own projectile?

Just then, the wind carried a voice into the puzzled Nigun's ears.

"My apologies, It would seem my subordinate used a combination of the Missile Parry and Counter Arrow skills to return your projectile to your man. I believe you have some sort of magic which defends against ranged attacks on your persons. That would mean an attack that is stronger than the defense will break through it, no? It's hardly worth panicking about."

After his explanation, Ainz paid no attention to Ainz, and turned to Albedo:

"Although, Albedo, you should know that ranged weapons like that will not be able to harm me. There was no need to—"

"—Please wait, Ainz-sama. Anyone who wishes to do battle with a Supreme Being must have a certain degree of strength. A sling bullet like that was nothing more than an insult to you!"

"Haha, so, that means Nigun and his lackeys fail the test, then?"

“Ngk! Puh! Principality of Observation! Get him!”

In response to Nigun’s orders, the angel that had been standing by up till now suddenly spread its wings and flapped, propelling itself forward.

The Principality of Observation was an angel in full body armor. It held a mace in one hand and a round shield in the other. A garment that looked like a long skirt covered its legs.

The Principality of Observation was stronger than the Archangel Flames, but it had not been deployed into battle until now because of its special skill. In accordance with its name, the Principality of Observation had the ability to raise the defense of all its allies. However, this ability lost its effect once the angel moved, so the wise decision would be to order the Principality of Observation to hold its ground.

The fact that Nigun had ordered it to attack was a sign that he was grasping at straws. He had to clutch at anything which might turn out to be a lifeline, even if it ended up being chaff.

“Fall back, Albedo.”

As ordered, the angel drew up in front of Ainz, and raised its shining mace. Ainz nonchalantly reached out his gauntleted left hand to meet the attack.

While it would not have been surprising for that strike to shatter bone, Ainz’s hand was fine. He casually took the subsequent hits as they came.

“Good grief… I guess it’s my turn now. [Hell Flame].”

A small, wobbling mote of flame emerged from one of the fingers of Ainz’s right hand. It looked so feeble that anyone could blow it out if they wanted. It touched the body of the Principality of Observation, and looked terribly laughable against the glittering body of the angel.

But then—

The Principality of Observation was consumed by a black fire, so intense that even Nigun, a good distance away, could feel the heat. He could barely keep his eyes open.

The angel's body melted and vanished amidst the the sky-scorching black flames, without so much as the chance to resist. The flames that devoured the angel vanished with their target.

No traces were left behind. The previous scene — that of the angel's attack and the black conflagration — felt like they had been illusions, like they had never happened.

"How, how could this be."

"In just one hit…"

"Hiiiiiiii!"

"Im-im-impossible!!!!!" Nigun shouted amidst his confusion.

He did not even know he was shouting. He was simply converting his thoughts into words. It did not feel like shouting to him.

The Principality of Observation was a high-tier angel whose offensive and defensive strength were in a 3:7 ratio. It boasted the strongest defense of all other angels in its tier.

In addition, Nigun's natural-born talent, [Enhance Summoned Monster], could improve the stats of any monster Nigun summoned. As a result, there were very few people who could defeat a Principality of Observation summoned by Nigun.

Nigun had never seen anyone defeat it with just one spell. Even the Black Scripture, whose members' power pressed against the limits of humanity, could not do it. In other words, Ainz Ooal Gown's power exceeded that of mankind.

"It's can't be! It's impossible!! Nobody can defeat a high-tier angel with just one spell!!! What kind of man are you, Ainz Ooal Gown?!!!! It's impossible that nobody's heard of you before!!!!! What is your real name!!!!!!"

There was no trace of calm left in Nigun, just his wild screaming in the hope of denying reality.

Ainz spread his hands once more. Under the light of the setting sun, the looked like they were drenched in blood.

"...Why do you think it is impossible? Is that not just the result of your ignorance? Or do you mean to say that this is all you know of the world? There is only one thing I can do to answer your question."

Silenced reigned in the air as they awaited the answer. Ainz's voice was as clear as a bell:

"My name is Ainz Ooal Gown. That is definitely not an alias."

In the face of Ainz's arrogance, Nigun was unable to rebutt what he was hearing. It was something he did not understand from a man he did not know. That was the situation he was in.

Nigun was starting to get annoyed by his rapid breathing.

The sound of grass rustling in the wind was annoying too. His heartbeat sounded especially loud. He was breathing heavily, like he had been running for a long time.

Words of reassurance began appearing in his head. However, the sight of Ainz being stabbed with swords, as well as his mass slaughter of angels with just one spell, were telling Nigun something else.

—That is a monster beyond my wildest imaginings. I could never hope to defeat it.

“Cap-Captain, what, what should we do...?”

“Figure it out yourself! I’m not your mother!”

Nigun only managed to calm down after he could no longer see the face of the man he was shouting at.

Losing his cool in front of an unknown monster like this was a very bad thing.

The sun was slowly falling below the horizon, and darkness threatened to swallow the world. It felt like Death itself was opening its maw to devour everything. Nigun tried to force his fear back, and gave an order:

“Protect me! Protect me if you want to live!”

Nigun brought the crystal out in his trembling hand. His subordinates, usually vigorous and nimble, were chained down by fear and their movements were slow. Even these fearless men would hesitate when ordered to become a shield against a monster like the one which stood before them. However, he had to have them buy him some time, no matter what.

The magic sealed within the crystal could summon the most powerful angel known to man. It was an angel that had single-handedly destroyed a Demon God that rampaged throughout the land 200 years ago.

It was an angel of the highest order, that could easily destroy a city.

Casting the spell to summon that angel again required an incalculable amount of money and manpower, but Ainz Ooal Gown, this mysterious being, was worthy of being eliminated by its power. More importantly, it would be worse if the crystal was taken without the spell being cast.

This was what Nigun told himself.

He concealed his fear that he would become a lump of meat like his deceased underling.

“I am going to summon an angel of the highest order, hurry up and buy me some time!”

Once they realized the truth, his subordinates moved swiftly.

Ainz, who was facing them, should have noticed the flames of hope blazing up. However, he made no move, instead babbling about some nonsense to himself.

“...Could that be a spell-sealing crystal… and from its brilliance, it should be something that can seal anything except a super-tier spell. So they have a YGGDRASIL item like that as well… that being the case, what kind of angel can they summon… Seraph-class? Albedo, protect me with your skill. While I don’t think they can bring out a Seraph Aesphere, if they manage to summon a Seraph Empyrean, we will have to fight them seriously. Or rather… could it be a monster unique to this world?”

While Ainz held his ground, Nigun ritually broke the crystal in his hand, and a brilliant radiance spilled forth.

A hidden sun seemed to have risen upon the land, dying the grass a blinding white. A dull fragrance filtered into everyone's noses.

The legendary angel descended upon the earth, and Nigun exulted:

"Behold! The glorious visage of the highest angel! Dominion Authority!"

It was a mass of many shining wings, and among them were a pair of arms that held a scepter, symbolizing royal authority, but there was no head or legs visible. Though it looked quite disturbing, anyone could tell this was a sacred being. In the moment it appeared, the surrounding air turned bright and clear.

The advent of this supreme incarnation of goodness drew wild cheers from everyone who saw it. The blood of Nigun's men boiled with excitement.

Now, they could kill Ainz Ooal Gown.

This time, he would be the one to be afraid.

He would learn his foolishness before the power of the gods.

In the face of their jubilance, Ainz barely managed to get a sentence out:

"This… this is it? This is what you call getting serious…? This is your ace in the hole that you were planning to use on me?"

As he saw Ainz's shock, Nigun, who had been extremely uneasy, breathed a sigh of relief. In fact, his heart was filled with joy as he replied:

“Indeed! Your fear is only natural. After all, this is what an angel of the highest order looks like. While using it here seems like a bit of a waste, I have determined that you are worthy of it!”

“How could this be…”

Ainz slowly raised his hand and covered his face. To Nigun, it looked like a gesture of despair.

“Ainz Ooal Gown. The truth is, you deserve respect for forcing me to summon this most exalted of angels. Be proud of your fearsome strength, magic caster!”

Nigun nodded deeply, and continued:

“Personally speaking, I would like to bring you into our fold. If you are truly that powerful… however, I am not allowed to do so on this mission. At the very least, I shall remember you — the magic caster who made me decide to summon this mighty angel.”

However, the response to Nigun’s praise was a cold voice:

“Really… this is ridiculous.”

“What?”

Nigun had no idea what Ainz was saying. To Nigun, Ainz was little more than a sacrifice to the highest order of angel, which humanity could not possibly defeat. Yet, his attitude seemed too relaxed for that.

“I can’t believe I was on guard against such child’s play… my apologies, Albedo. I made you use your skill for nothing.”

“Please, do not say that, Ainz-sama. We did not know what manner of monster they might have called forth, so it was prudent to reduce the chances of injury.”

“Is that so…? No, you’re right. It’s just that I did not expect this to be all. It was quite unexpected.”

Nigun’s mind could not keep up with their patronizing banter.

“How can you act like that in front of the angel of the highest order?!” Nigun shouted, He could not believe that Ainz and Albedo were chatting leisurely and completely ignoring Dominion Authority.

Their calm attitude of absolute superiority made the surging joy in Nigun’s heart vanish. In its place was terror and unease.

Could it be that Ainz Ooal Gown is more powerful than this mightiest of angels?

“No! Impossible! It cannot be! Nobody can be stronger than the highest-placed of the angels! This is a being which can defeat a Demon God! In the face of a foe that humanity cannot beat — it’s a bluff! It must be a bluff!”

It would seem Nigun could no longer control his emotions.

He could not, would not acknowledge this. He could not believe that a man who could defeat Dominion Authority was not only an enemy of the Slaine Theocracy, but was standing right in front of him.

“Use it! Use [Holy Smite]!”

This was magic of the 7th tier and above, a realm humanity could not reach. Even the large-scale rituals in the Slaine Theocracy could not cast it, but this

most exalted of angels, Dominion Authority, could do it by itself. That was why it was ranked among the highest order of all angels.

The magic that Nigun ordered to be cast, the 7th tier [Holy Smite], was such a mighty spell.

“I got it, I got it. Hurry up and make your move. I won’t do anything. That should satisfy you, right?”

However, Ainz’s relaxed attitude was like a pedestrian letting another person walk past him.

His casual attitude filled Nigun with fear.

This angel of the highest order had once defeated the Demon Gods of legends. Its omnipotent power was enough to qualify it as the mightiest being on the continent. It was invincible.

Yet, if someone could defeat it...

If the mysterious magic caster before him could do it, it would mean that this mysterious person was a far stronger being than a Demon God.

Such a person could not exist.

In response to its summoner’s wish to use its most powerful attack, Dominion Authority shattered its scepter. The fragments rose up into the air and slowly orbited its body.

“I see. So this is a once-per-summoning special skill that it uses to augment its spell power. It would seem this Dominion is about the same as the one in YGGDRASIL…”

「Holy Smite」.

The spell was cast, and a pillar of light broke through the sky.

With a loud *whoosh*, a seemingly endless cascade of holy blue-white radiance flooded down from the heavens, submerging Ainz, who simply raised one arm to shade his eyes.

The 7th tier of magic — a height humanity could not hope to attain.

This sacred power would annihilate all evil beings, and even good entities would meet the same fate. The difference was only if they were reduced to sightless atoms, or if there would actually be remains left behind. This was the awesome power of magic that exceeded the realm of humanity.

No, it would be strange if that were not the case.

Yet — he was still there.

Ainz Ooal Gown, the monster, was not blasted into glowing ash, sprawled on the ground or pulverized into meat jelly, but he was still standing nonchalantly, and even laughing:

"—Hahahahaha, as expected of magic that has extra effect on those of evil alignment… so this is what taking damage feels like… pain, is it? I see, I see! Still, even though I feel pain, my mind is clear, and my ability to act is not affected at all."

The pillar of light vanished. It had not had any effect.

"Wonderful, I've concluded another experiment."

His voice sounded indifferent… no, it would be more accurate to say that he was satisfied.

Nigun and company thought that way, and the smiles on their faces froze.

However, one person was filled with anger.

“You, you inferior lifeforms!”

Albedo’s shout ripped through the air.

“You inferior lifeforms! How, how dare you do such a thing to my beloved lord, Ainz-sama! You pieces of trash, how dare you cause pain to the man I love, my master Ainz-sama! Do not think that I will allow you to die so easily! I will have you taste the greatest suffering this world has to offer until you go mad from agony! I will melt off your limbs with acid, cut off your genitals and feed them to you as mincemeat! Then I will heal you and do it again! Aaahhhhhhhh! I hate you! I hate you I hate you I hate you so much that my heart is going to burst—”

Her arms, clawing at her head and sheathed in black armor, were writhing.

It felt like the world was distorting, with her at the center. A wave of world-twisting, courage-sapping malice smashed into them like a hurricane.

Something seemed to be crawling under that black armor, like there was an enormous creature that was about to break through the plates and reveal itself. Nigun knew this was happening, but there was nothing he could do but stand there and watch the emergence of a monster that would pollute the world.

Only one person in this world could rein her in. Ainz raised his hand and quietly said:

“That’s enough, Albedo.”

Those words were enough to stop Albedo in her tracks.

“...But, but Ainz-sama, these inferior lifeforms…”

“—It’s fine, Albedo… everything has gone according to my predictions, aside from the weakness of the angels. What else is there to be angry about?”

As Albedo heard this, she raised a hand to her breast and bowed in acknowledgement.

“...As expected of Ainz-sama, your insight is truly fitting of the title ‘fathomless’. I am in awe.”

“Nonono, the truth is, I’m quite glad that you would be worried and angry for me. However… your charming smile is far more preferable.”

“Gufu—! Char-charming! —cough, thank you, Ainz-sama.”

“Now then, I’m sorry you had to wait for so long.”

Nigun, who was stunned by their easy-going back and forth, finally managed to recover enough of his senses to shout:

“I know it… I know your true identities! —-Demon Gods! You must be Demon Gods.”

There were scant few intelligent beings that Nigun knew of, which could stand on par with the highest-tier angels:

The Six Gods which Nigun believed in

The kings of the mighty draconic races — the Dragon Lords.

The legendary monster who could destroy an entire country — Landfall.

And one more — the Demon Gods.

He had heard that the Thirteen Heroes had defeated and sealed away the Demon Gods. Judging by that wave of evil from just now, that must have been a Demon God about to break its seal.

At the same time, Nigun had the faint hope that if they were Demon Gods, then Dominion Authority might still have a chance to win.

“One more time! Use ‘Holy Smite’!”

Ainz said that the spell had hurt. That meant that he had been injured. It might mean that he had trouble just standing up.

Countless “mights” popped up in Nigun’s mind. Without them, he would go mad.

However, Ainz would not permit a second attack.

“...Now, it’s my turn… know despair. [Black Hole]!”

A small point appeared on Dominion Authority’s shining body. It slowly enlarged into a yawning black void.

The black hole swallowed everything.

It was so underwhelming that it made them stare in dumbfounded silence. It might even be laughable. But they could no longer see it.

As the radiance of Dominion Authority vanished, the light drained from the surroundings.

There was only the sound of the wind blowing across the plains. And then a hoarse cry broke the silence.

“Who… are you people…” Nigun asked these impossible beings again. “I have never heard the name of a magic caster called Ainz Ooal Gown before… no, there can’t be someone who could destroy the highest-ranked angel in one blow! Someone like that should not exist...”

Nigun shook his head powerlessly.

“All I know is that you are far beyond a Demon God… this is unbelievable… who exactly are you…”

“...Like I said, I am Ainz Ooal Gown. In the past, there was nobody who did not tremble at this name. Well, I guess we’ve spent enough time on idle chatter. Going on would only be pointless. Also, just so we don’t waste each other’s time, there is an anti-teleport effect surrounding me, and my subordinates are waiting in ambush. You have nowhere to run.”

The sun set completely, and darkness swallowed the land.

Nigun knew that this was the end. This was an unassailable reality. Just as his subordinates fell into despair one after the other, cracks appeared in the sky, like the breaking of a pot. They vanished in an instant, and the scenery returned to normal.

As confusion washed over Nigun, Ainz answered:

“Good grief… you know, you should thank me. It would seem someone was using divination magic to keep an eye on you, but because I was in the spell’s effective range, my anti-scrying offensive barrier activated, and you were not

observed. Really, if I had known, I would have linked a higher-tier attack spell to it."

Those words filled Nigun's eyes with realization.

The Slaine Theocracy must have been spying on him.

"A widened [Explosion] might not be enough to teach them how to behave… oh well, things being as they are, playtime is over."

A wave of cold ran through Nigun as he picked up the hidden meaning in those words.

He, who had always been the oppressor, was now going to become one of the oppressed.

He was filled with an incomparable fear. The fear that he, who had taken countless lives in the past, was now going to have his own life taken. His subordinates saw his terrified expression and it frightened them as well.

He was on the verge of tears.

He wanted to kneel down and loudly beg for his life, but Ainz did not look like a compassionate man. Thus, Nigun fought back the urge to weep, trying his best to look for a way to survive. But no matter how he thought, he could not think of any way to get help from the outside. Therefore, his only hope was to throw himself on the mercy of Ainz Ooal Gown.

"Wait, wait a bit! Ainz Ooal Gown-dono, no, -sama! Please wait, we, no, I wish to make a deal with you! I guarantee you will not be disappointed! As long as you spare me, I will give you any amount of money you want!"

He could see his shocked subordinates out of the corner of his eye, but they were no longer relevant to him. The thing that mattered now was his own life. Everything else was of secondary importance.

Besides, he could find more subordinates, but his own self was irreplaceable.

Ignoring the countless angry voices of his men, Nigun continued:

“It must be difficult to satisfy the tastes of such a great magic caster as yourself, but I will definitely prepare enough money to please you! I have a position of some power in my country, so they will definitely pay any price to ransom me! Of course, if you desire anything else, I will do my best to meet your wishes! So I beg you! Please spare my life!”

Nigun panted as he finished his monologue.

“What, what about it? Ainz Ooal Gown-sama!”

A delicate, gentle woman’s voice responded to Nigun’s desperate plea:

“Did you not reject the compassionate offer of the Supreme One, Ainz-sama?”

“That is!”

“...I know what you want to say. You wanted to beg for your life because accepting his proposition would also mean your death. Am I correct?”

The black-helmeted head shook, as though it were tired of talking.

“You seem to have gotten the wrong idea. Since Ainz-sama, who holds the power of life and death in Nazarick, has already stated his will, inferior lifeforms like you humans should lower your heads and gratefully await the taking of your lives.”

Albedo's forceful words were backed by an adamant resolve.

She's mad. This woman is mad. Nigun, who realized this, looked hopefully to Ainz.

Ainz had been quietly listening to them. When he realized that Nigun was waiting for his decision, he shook his head in exasperation and said:

"Indeed… it is as she says. Cease your pointless struggles and lie down quietly. As a final act of mercy, I will kill you without drawing out your suffering."

Part 2

As he walked along the night-veiled plains, Ainz raised his head. What greeted him was the beautiful sight of stars in the sky.

Ainz sighed at the scenery for the second time, and then he headed back to the village.

He had gone a little overboard.

As long as Albedo was by his side, he could not afford to appear useless to her. As her master, he needed to act in a fitting manner in front of his subordinates. While he might have gone a bit too far, it still fit the role he was playing.

He did not know if he had passed or failed, but it would be fine as long as Albedo was not disappointed.

Ainz could not see Albedo's expression of "Damn, Ainz-sama was so cool, kufufufu~" under her closed helmet. Since he could not tell what she was thinking, he went over the day's proceedings once more.

"Still, Ainz-sama, why did you save Gazef?"

Why indeed? Ainz could not articulate his feelings at that time, so he tried to approximate them for her:

"This was a problem we caused, so shouldn't we try and settle it ourselves?"

"Then why did you give him that item?"

"I was laying the foundation for future plans. Letting him hold it would be a good thing for me."

Ainz had a lot of the YGGDRASIL cash items that he had given Gazef. Although he could not replenish his stock of them, giving one away was not a great loss.

In addition, Ainz was actually happy to have less of those items.

That was because those were consolation prizes from the 500 yen gacha draws, which reminded Ainz of how profligate he had been with his spending and his poor lifestyle then. In addition, while he had spent countless 500 yen coins on finally getting the ultra-rare item that was the top prize, his former comrade Yamaiko had gotten it on the first try. The impact of that incident cast an indelible shadow in Ainz's heart.

He had wanted to throw those consolation prizes away, but when he thought of the 500 yen it had cost… he could not bear to wastefully dispose of it.

"Well, it doesn't matter who ends up with that item in the end, or if it ends up being used or not. It's no loss to me."

"...Would it not have been best to let me take care of things? There was no need to trouble Ainz-sama to personally aid those inferior lifeforms… surrounding them was hardly a difficult task, which is why I submit that Ainz-sama did not need to personally take the field."

"Is that so…"

Without a device to measure power levels, that was all Ainz could say in response.

In YGGDRASIL, one could determine the strength of an enemy by the color of their names. Beyond that, one could only rely on information from one's friends and walkthrough sites.

Ainz could not help but feel nostalgic.

If only I had learned some information-type spells — Ainz thought, with a hint of regret. Of course, he did not know if those spells could be used here. However, if he could, then he would not have to be as nervous as he was now.

Still, there was no point worrying about what he did not have. Ainz decided to think of something else:

"...I know your strength, Albedo, and I trust you. However, I would like you to discard such shallow thinking and remember that an enemy who is stronger than myself could appear at any time. This is especially true given that we do not quite understand this world… so I hoped Gazef could do our work for us."

"I see… so you used him as a pawn to feel out the enemy's strength. It is quite fitting to use inferior lifeforms like humans in that way."

Although the closed helm revealed none of her emotions, her freshly-flowered joy was obvious in her voice.

Ainz had been a human in the past, and now he was undead. Since just now, he had sensed that Albedo hated humans very much . However, it did not upset him or make him feel depressed. Rather, he felt that such thoughts were quite suitable for the inhuman Guardian Overseer of the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick.

"...Indeed. However, that is not all. Since we saved him at the brink of death, he will be even more grateful to us. In addition, since the enemy was a special forces unit, the country's higher-ups will not investigate the matter too openly. That was why I stepped in."

"Ah… as expected of Ainz-sama... so that was why you took the commander and the others alive. Marvellously done!"

Ainz could not help but feel proud when he heard Albedo's praise. After all, he managed to put together a sensible, coherent plan in a short period of time; perhaps this was his leadership talent at work. Just then, Albedo's cheerful voice entered Ainz's self-satisfied ears:

"...Still, was it necessary to take the angels' swords with your precious body, Ainz-sama?"

"Is that how it looked to you? When we first came to Carne Village, we used the knights on the outskirts to verify that my High-Tier Physical Nullification was still working normally."

"Indeed, you are correct. I verified it with my own eyes as well. However, I did not wish my eyes to helplessly watch the swords of those despicable angels piercing your body, Ainz-sama."

"I see. Though you were my shield, I did not take your feelings into consideration. You have my—"

"—And even if I knew you would emerge unscathed, which woman would want to see the man she loves being stabbed by swords?"

"...Ah, yes."

Ainz did not know how to answer, so he let it slide as he continued to the village. Albedo did not seem to want to press the matter and followed quietly.

Once they reached the village, the villagers, led by the Death Knight, came out to meet them.

They lavished praise and thanks onto them, and Ainz saw Gazef among the villagers.

“Oh, Warrior-Captain-dono, I’m glad you’re alright. I should have gone to your side earlier, but the item I gave you took some time to work, which was why I was almost too late. My apologies.”

“What are you saying? It is I who should thank you, Gown-dono. After all, you saved me… speaking of which, where did those fellows go?”

Since Gazef had changed his tone somewhat, Ainz decided to nonchalantly inspect him.

Gazef had taken off his armor and carried no weapons with him.

He was bruised all over and half his face was swollen up, like a strange-looking, misshapen ball. Yet, a fire burned within his eyes.

Ainz turned away, as though he had seen something brilliant. His eyes reflexively went to the ring Gazef wore on his left ring finger.

So he was married. It’s probably good that his wife won’t need to shed tears for him. As he thought about that, Ainz decided to carefully put on an act:

“Oh, I chased them off. I couldn’t take care of all of them, as I thought.”

That was a lie, of course. They had all been shipped back to the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick. Gazef narrowed his eyes a little, but neither of them spoke. The air between them grew tense.

In the end, Gazef broke the silence:

“Truly amazing. I do not know how I can repay you for your help, Gown-dono. Please, look for me when you come to the Royal Capital. I will welcome you with open arms.”

“Is that so… then, I will have to impose on you when the time comes.”

“...Gown-dono, I do not know what plans you have, but would you be willing to travel with us? We will be staying in this village for a while.”

“Is that so. Well, I was planning to move on, though I have not decided my destination yet.”

“Still, it’s already so late, travelling now would be…”

Gazef cut himself off halfway:

“Forgive me, there was no need to worry about a mighty being like yourself, Gown-dono. Then, please seek me out when you reach the capital. My doors will always be open to you. In addition, I am deeply grateful to you for your gift of a full set of equipment from the knights who attacked the village.”

Ainz nodded, and decided that he had taken care of everything he needed to do in this village. There had been more things to do here than he had expected, and he had spent more time here than he had planned.

“Let’s go home, Albedo,” Ainz said in a voice low enough that only Albedo could here. She immediately turned around joyfully in response — although she was still wearing her full plate armor.

Overlord Volume 1

EPILOGUE

Ainz's room was filled with exquisite furniture, while the floor was laid with a bright red carpet. This vast room was usually draped in a thin veil of silence, and today it was even more quiet than normal. The maid who normally attended him here was nowhere to be seen. The only people here were Ainz and his sword-bearing Death Knight in the corner.

Albedo spoke in a soft, syrupy sweet voice, as though trying to preserve the silence of the room:

"I have a report to deliver. The commander of the Slaine Theocracy's Sunlight Scripture who we captured has been incarcerated in the Frozen Prison. We will extract information from him with the help of the Special Intelligence-Gathering Officer."

"If it's Neuronist, there shouldn't be any problems. However, I want to conduct experiments on the bodies… do you know anything about this?"

"Understood. In addition, we are currently looking through the arms and armor recovered from the men dressed as knights. They do not bear any major enchantments and will be sent to the Treasury after the investigations are concluded."

"...Well, that's the proper way to dispose of them."

"Finally, I plan to have two Shadow Demons keep an eye on the village. Then, what should we do about Gazef Stronoff?"

“Leave the Warrior-Captain be for now. It is more important that we build a good relationship with that village. We might need their help in future, so avoid antagonizing them.”

“Understood. I will take care of it. Thus ends the report.”

Ainz turned to look at Albedo as he said “Well done”. The look on her face was slightly different from her usual gentle smile. She seemed particularly happy today.
The reason was the sparkling Ring (of Ainz Ooal Gown) upon her left ring finger, which she caressed lovingly.

Although she could wear the ring anywhere she wanted, it was not hard to tell why she was wearing the ring on that finger.

If that was how Albedo truly felt, then as a man, he would be overjoyed. However, if that was the result of Ainz’s tampering, it would make him feel guilty instead.

“Albedo… the love you feel for me is the result of my tampering. They are certainly not your original feelings. Therefore…”

What should he do next? Was it right to change her memories with magic?

Ainz could not go on. Just then, Albedo looked at Ainz and smiled.

“Before you changed me, what kind of person was I, Ainz-sama?”

A slut.

Ainz could not say that, of course, but he did not know how to tell her. Though he appeared calm enough on the exterior, his heart was in chaos. Then, Albedo spoke again.

“Then, I am quite happy with the way I am now, so there is no need for you to feel upset, Ainz-sama.”

“But…”

“But...? But what, may I ask?”

Ainz did not answer, sensing something unusual coming from Albedo. She continued addressing the silent Ainz:

“There is only one thing that matters.”

As Ainz waited for Albedo to continue, she said:

“Does it trouble you?”

Ainz dumbly opened his mouth, taking note of Albedo’s smiling face. Her words branded themselves deeply into his brain — although his skull was empty — but Ainz knew what she was trying to say, and hastily replied:

“No, no, how could it inconvenience me...”

He was not at all unhappy with receiving the love of a beauty like Albedo. At least, for now.

“Then, is there a problem with it?”

"...Eh—"

It felt wrong. He thought that, but Ainz could not find any reason to refute her.

"Then, it should be fine, right?" Albedo said again. Ainz could sense something mysterious and inscrutable in those words, and he brought up a question in a final, desperate attempt to struggle free:

"I messed with Tabula-san's character settings. Don't you wish to go back to your old self?"

"I believe Tabula-sama would approve, with all the joy of giving his daughter away for marriage."

"...Is, is that so?"

Was he really like that? Just as Ainz was thinking about this, the sound of crashing metal rang out.

He turned to look at the source of the sound, and saw a longsword on the ground. The Death Knight who should have been holding that sword was nowhere to be seen. He had summoned the missing Death Knight not long ago.

"...When I summon them normally, they disappear after a while… given the way the sword from this world is on the ground, it would seem that equipment alone was not enough to bind them to this world, so it was left behind. If that is the case, does that Death Knight remain here because I used a corpse to summon it? It would appear that I can strengthen Nazarick if I had more corpses."

"Then, shall we collect a large number of corpses for you?"

"...Try to avoid digging up that village's graveyard."

"Understood. However, we must then consider a way to procure fresh corpses. Now that the Death Knight has disappeared, everyone should have assembled by now. Please proceed to the throne room with Sebas. I will go ahead first."

"I see. Alright, Albedo. I'll see you later."

♦ ♦ ♦

As Albedo quietly left Ainz's room, she saw Sebas approaching along the corridor.

"Sebas, you've come just in time."

"Albedo-sama. Is Momonga-sama in his room?"

"Yes, he is."

Albedo could not help but feel superior as she heard Sebas still referring to Ainz as Momonga. As he saw the look on her face, Sebas raised an eyebrow.

"You seem to be in a good mood. Did something good happen?"

"Yes."

Albedo's joy was not just because of the name, but because she recalled her conversation with Ainz. She spoke of marrying Ainz, and he did not reject or deny the suggestion. In other words...

Albedo's smile shifted, going from graceful and elegant to lewd and wicked in an instant. it was a smile she would never show to Ainz.

"Kufufufu, I've done it. No, I will definitely do it. I will be the one seated beside him. Shalltear will be nothing more than my footrest."

Albedo clenched her fist, unable to resist the words boiling up in her heart. These were not words of a Guardian Overseer, but a woman.

"Ah, my succubus blood is boiling…"

Sebas silently watched Albedo as she acted up.

♦ ♦ ♦

The Throne Room

Sebas trailed behind Ainz as he entered the room, fashionably late.

There were many people kneeling here, to show their loyalty.

Nobody in this place moved a muscle, and it was so quiet that even the sound of their breathing could be heard. Apart from that, there was only the sound of Ainz and Sebas' footsteps, as well as the tapping of the Staff of Ainz Ooal Gown on the ground.

Ainz ascended the stairs and sat on the throne. Sebas remained at the foot of the throne, kneeling behind Albedo.

Ainz silently surveyed the throne room from where he was seated.

Almost all of the guild's NPCs were gathered below him. They looked quite majestic when he watched them from on high, like a Night Parade of monsters. Ainz could not help but silently praise his guild members for their creativity in making so many different and interesting characters. As he looked again, there were several NPCs who were not present. However, that could not be helped. After all, they could not easily move the ultra-large golem Gargantua and Victim — who oversaw the 8th Floor — from their positions.

However, it was not just NPCs who were gathered here. Although they were not intended to replace the abovementioned two people, this great hall also contained many high-levelled vassals who had been hand-picked by the other Floor Guardians.

That said — the Throne Room did not feel crowded at all, given its massive size. Although he could understand why his underlings would not want to let their servants into the heart of the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick — the Throne Room — Ainz felt that such severity was not needed.

Ah, forget it, not like it's important anyway. After deciding to discuss those matters later, Ainz slowly addressed his subordinates.

"Firstly, I would like to apologize for taking independent action."

Ainz was feeling singularly unapologetic as he said those words. It was mere pleasantry, yet the apology was extremely important. Since gathering them all was his idea, then he needed to let his subordinates know that he trusted them implicitly.

"Albedo will tell you why I have gathered you all here afterwards. However, there is a matter which is more important than that. I must tell the gathered members of the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick something — [Greater Break Item]."

Ainz cast a spell which could destroy a magic item of a certain level. A large flag fell from one of the poles attached to the ceiling.

The sigil on the flag represented “Momonga”.

“I have changed my name. From now on, my name is…”

Ainz pointed to a certain place, and everyone’s eyes followed his finger.

“My name is Ainz Ooal Gown. You may address me as Ainz.”

Momonga was pointing to the flag which hung behind the throne, imprinted with the icon of Ainz Ooal Gown. Momonga raised his staff and forcefully slammed its tip into the ground, to get everybody’s attention.

“If anyone objects to this, rise now and let your views be heard!”

Nobody spoke out in opposition. Albedo was all smiles as she replied:

“We have all heard your glorious name. All hail Ainz Ooal Gown! Oh Supreme One, Ainz Ooal Gown-sama, every member of the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick pledges their undying loyalty to you.”

Shortly after, the Floor Guardians shouted as one:

“All glory to Ainz Ooal Gown! Supreme Lord and leader of us all, Ainz Ooal Gown-sama! We shall give ourselves completely to you!”

“Long live Ainz Ooal Gown! Oh King of fearsome power, Ainz Ooal Gown-sama! All shall know of your greatness!”

The shouts and praise of the NPCs and servants thundered through the Throne Room.

♦ ♦ ♦

As he basked in the praise of his subordinates, Ainz thought:

—My friends, what do you think of me using this great name? Are you happy? Are you displeased? If you have any objections, please let me know, tell me "this is not a name you can take for yourself". I will gladly return to my old name of Momonga.

♦ ♦ ♦

"Then—"

Ainz looked out at everyone.

"—Next, I shall announce our new direction. This is an absolute order."

Ainz paused here, and looked around. The subordinates before him had serious, stern looks on their faces.

"Make Ainz Ooal Gown an eternal legend."

He gripped the Staff of Ainz Ooal Gown tightly, and rapped it on the ground. Then, as though responding to Ainz, the crystals socketed on the Staff of Ainz Ooal Gown radiated light in all the colors of the rainbow, and the air around him trembled.

“There may be many heroes, but we will surpass each and every one of them. We will let everybody in this world know that Ainz Ooal Gown are the true heroes! If there are people stronger than us, we will deal with them in ways other than force. If we encounter a magician with many subordinates, we will achieve our goal some other way. This is merely the preparatory phase in order to let everyone know that Ainz Ooal Gown is the greatest. Let us fight together for this glorious future!”

He would spread this name throughout the world. The former members of Ainz Ooal Gown may have left YGGDRASIL, but there was a chance they might be in this world, like Ainz.

Therefore, he had to make Ainz Ooal Gown a legend, so everyone would know of it.

Be it in the air, land or sea, he would spread this name to all the sapient beings in this world.

He would carry this name to the ears of his comrades who might be in this world.

Ainz’s fearsome presence was startling, and his thunderous voice could be heard anywhere in the Throne Room.

Their voices united as one, everyone in the Throne Room lowered their heads. The sound they made might have been taken for a prayer.

♦ ♦ ♦

The throne was vacant after its master left, but the air in the Throne Room still boiled with excitement.

Hearing their supreme overlord's orders to work as one filled everybody with incomparable motivation, especially those who had been given specific orders.

"Everyone, raise your heads."

After hearing Albedo's calm and steady voice, the people whose heads were still lowered lifted their heads in unison.

"Everyone, please act as Ainz-sama orders. After that, I have something to announce."

Albedo's eyes were fixed on the flag of Ainz Ooal Gown that hung behind the throne. The NPCs and servants behind her were also looking at it.

"Demiurge, tell everyone what Ainz-sama said to you."

"Understood."

Demiurge was kneeling with everyone else. However, his voice could clearly be heard by everyone present.

"Ainz-sama looked to the night sky and told me: 'Perhaps the reason that I have come here is to claim this chest of jewels which belongs to nobody'. After that, he said: 'No, this is not something I can claim for myself. Perhaps these jewels are meant to adorn the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick; myself and my friends from Ainz Ooal Gown'. The chest of jewels here refers to the world. This is where Ainz-sama's true ambitions lie."

Demiurge smiled, but it was filled with something other than kindness.

"Finally, Ainz-sama said: 'However, conquering this world might be quite interesting'. In short, that means…"

The looks in everyone's eyes turned razor-sharp. It represented their iron will and determination.

Albedo rose slowly, to look on everyone's faces.

Everyone looked at Albedo, as if in response. At the same time, they looked at the flag of Ainz Ooal Gown behind her.

"Understanding Ainz-sama's true intentions and preparing for them is the proof of our loyalty and the mark of excellent subordinates. Everyone must keep in mind that the final objective of the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick is to deliver this chest of jewels — the world — to Ainz-sama."

Albedo was all smiles, and she turned that smile to the flag behind her.

"Ainz-sama, we will definitely give this world to you."

Then, countless voices spoke as one, their words echoing across the Throne Room.

"We will render everything in this world unto its rightful ruler, Ainz-sama."

Overlord Volume 1

Afterword

Pleased to meet you, dear readers who are reading the afterword.

I am the author, Maruyama.

This work is a revision of the web novel version of Overlord, with new characters as well as lots of new and edited content.

If you have already bought this book, I am glad.

If you are browsing this book, I will use my psycho power to make you bring it to the counter and pay for it. Muuun~

The main character of this book is a skeletal magician who leads a vast evil organization, and he is meant to feel like the final boss of a game. Because of that, those readers who don't believe in saving people without a reward (as is common in LNs or anime) and put themselves first will enjoy this book.

Apart from that, while this work has already been on the net for a long time, an important new character was added during the novelization. I would be very happy if everyone were to come to like her.

The truth is that I have never written an afterword before. Therefore, allow me to express my sincere thanks next:

I am especially grateful to my editor, F-da, whom I gave a lot of trouble, as well as so-bin-sama, who drew these beautiful insert pictures.

In addition, I must thank Chord Design Studio, who made this beautiful cover page, as well as Ohaku-sama, who helped correct and revise many things. Thank you very much.

In addition, I wish to thank the readers of the WN version who gave me their thoughts and who were willing to read this. Without you readers who found the WN interesting, it could not possibly have been novelized.

I also want to thank my university friend Honey, who helped me correct many contradictory and confusing parts of the book. I will need your help in the future as well. Finally, I wish to thank the readers who purchased this book. I would be very proud if you find Overlord interesting.

Incidentally, I plan to correct and add more scenes and content to volume 2. It feels like I'm writing a new work, so I can't help but cry and complain about the lack of time.

I would like it if you could support volume 2 as well.

Then, the afterword will end here.

I am extremely grateful to all of you. If you can continue to support me, I would be overjoyed.

See you again.

July 2012,

Maruyama Kugane

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